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September-281

MIKE SHAYNE



OCTOBER, 1973
VOL. 33, NO. 5

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

BLUE MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

He knew the secret of the Barton diamonds, all right. Knew them better than any man. Mike Shayne looked at him grimly. He'd never talk now. Not with an unheard scream on his lips—and a murder knife deep in his heart!

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 33, No. 5, October, 1973. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 8230 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90048. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) \$9.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$18.00; single copies 75¢. Second-class postage paid at Los Angeles, Calif. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1973, by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 8230 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, Calif. 90048.

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BLUE MURDER

Silent, alone, he waited, the one man who could lead Mike Shayne to the Barton Blue diamonds. Waited with an untold story on his lips—and a murder knife in his heart...

by BRETT HALLIDAY



The Treasure Chest was not Mike Shayne's idea of a restaurant. Nor was G. Patchen, the redhead's idea of an insurance adjustor. Nor was her proposal his idea of a case.

The detective felt uncomfortable in the obvious if muted elegance of a resort so in that it did not even advertise in the entertainment guidebooks, whose gourmet cuisine and service were as lofty as the prices listed on the right hand side of the huge handwritten menu.

Nor, when it came to the sub rosa recovery of a stolen jewelry, was he accustomed to dealing with a woman. Not a

woman like G. Patchen at any rate.

Looking relaxed and casual and utterly unexcited, with her soft forest green pants suit italicizing the brighter, lighter green of her slightly tilted long lashed eyes, she made Shayne a bit conscious of the fact that his sports jacket was rumped, off the rack and a full month behind in a cleaning.

He toyed with his half-emptied Martell and soda while the silence between them lengthened and thickened. Then he said, "Just what is it you want me to do?"

A perfectly groomed left eyebrow arched a quarter of an inch. A soft, not quite husky

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THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



contralto voice replied, "We want you to recover the tones."

"Okay." He tried to ignore the fact that his finger nails were not wholly immaculate. "What are they worth?"

"According to last year's appraisal, slightly under a million dollars."

"Jesus!" said the redhead. He did not know whether he was relieved or not when the exquisite lady sitting opposite him revealed no reaction at all to his blasphemy. "That's a lot of carats."

As if she were reading a text, G. Patchen replied in measured accents, "The Barton Blues are blue diamonds, necklace, tiara, bracelets and clips. They are perfectly matched in color and cut. While their history is not as long or newsworthy as, say, the Hope diamond, they are unique."

"In that case," said Shayne, still feeling his way, "why didn't O. & W. keep them in the vault—or at least see to it they were efficiently guarded?"

"Oriental and Western provided ample security." The redhead all but shivered from the frost in those perfect accents. "Unfortunately, the thief or thieves were efficient, too, plus being damnably lucky."

"Thief or thieves?" said

Shayne. "You mean you don't know?"

A slight shake of the cool and beautiful auburn head; then: "There was a power failure at the party—all quite legitimate, I assure you. When the lights came on again—in less than three minutes, by the way—Doris Barton was stripped as clean as a Thanksgiving turkey. But that's water over the dam."

"Why Miami?" said the detective. "Why me? Surely, O. & W. has its own channels for recovery of stolen jewels."

"We do," said the lady in forest green, sipping her tiny liqueur glass of chartreuse. "Unfortunately, in this instance, the usual channels seem to have broken down."

She paused a moment, then went on: "We are quite certain the Barton Blues are in the Miami area. Which is why I am here. As for why you, Mr. Shayne, I could waste both our time extolling your well known record in handling cases of this sort. Actually, you are the last person I should have selected for the assignment."

"Then—?"

"I have called you in, Mr. Shayne, because Mr. Friezell recommended you."

Shayne battled an impulse to rise from his soft leather armchair and, after telling her

where she could put her proposition, stalking out into the afternoon. But quarterly estimated income tax payment was close upon him and money was short and million dollar jewel theft negotiations did not drop into his lap every day.

He said, "Okay, Patchen, what's the deal? I didn't even know the Barton Blues had been heisted."

"We want to keep it that way. Frankly, any and all personal considerations aside, I would have voted you out on the grounds that, over the years, you have received a distressing amount of publicity. Which is exactly what we don't want. One of the foundations of O. & W. is a hard earned reputation for keeping the misfortunes of its policy holders out of the news."

"I'll try," Mike Shayne promised.

"Of course you will, since your compensation will drop exactly thirty-three percent if any mention of the diamonds results from your activities."

"How much?" he asked.

She spoke of money as candidly and coolly as she seemed to speak of everything else. "Five thousand flat for retainer and expenses. Five thousand more for their safe return."

"For rocks worth a million

clams? Forget it!" The redhead actually made a move to get up, but cool soft surprisingly strong fingers on his left sleeve stayed him.

"Hear me out. There's a sliding scale bonus, of course, ranging from two to twenty percent of the sum O. & W. has to pay the thieves or their agents. The cheaper you get them back, the more you receive. Fair enough?"

The detective thought that over. He said, "How high is O. & W. willing to go?"

"Four hundred thousand—I believe you called them—clams." For the life of him, Shayne could not tell whether she was mocking him or not.

The redhead worked on it. Two percent of the maximum meant a bonus of eight grand; while twenty percent of half that sum would total forty gees. Not bad on top of the basic ten if he pulled it off without mention in the daily press or over the air.

He thought of his raffish, ribald newshawk friend Tim Rourke and winced. Oh, well, he concluded, even if he couldn't keep it under his hat, sixty-six and two thirds percent of such totals were more than he could afford to ignore.

He said, "What if this thing breaks through no fault of my own."

She said, "I don't believe you fully understand, Shayne. One of the things you're being paid for is to keep all mention of the theft out of the news."

She rose, graceful, elegant, insulting, and said, "I have a contract drawn up in my room."

The room was high in the gleaming white tower hotel of which the Treasure Chest was a ground floor adjunct. There was a secretary, female, an accountant, male, who witnessed the signatures. It was all rather overwhelming. When they had departed, briefcases under arm-pits, he said, "What? No attorney?"

There was the tiniest ghost of a smile on G. Patchen's perfect mouth. Gently, she replied, "I am an attorney, Shayne. Never fear, all legalities have been attended to."

"I didn't really doubt it for a moment," he said. "Okay, so now you own me. Who stole the Barton Blues?"

Seated on a corner of the hotel room desk, she dropped much of her ultra-refined mask, although her speech never lapsed into common-woman sloppiness. She said, "It had all the earmarks of a Joe Visconti heist. In fact, we had reason to believe some of Joe's men were in touch with us when the whole thing blew up."

"Just what did happen?" the redhead asked. His employer's lapse into the vernacular, her obvious professionalism made him feel a hell of a lot more at ease.

"Shayne, I wish to hell we knew," she said, shedding her aura of omniscience. "That's one of the things we're hoping you can uncover—secondary to recovering the loot at the lowest possible price, naturally."

Another pause, then, "All of a sudden—blackout. Joe Friezell—you know him, anyway he knows you—couldn't pry anything out of anyone. And if Joe couldn't—" She let it hang.

"I know," said the redhead. Joe Friezell, working out of his own agency, was virtually Shayne's New York opposite number. "How come he didn't come down?"

"Buried in work up to here." G. Patchen drew a hand across her lovely throat.

"What was the tip that brought you down here?"

She said, "Believe it, or not, a blonde was seen wearing them at the bar in Miami—not the Beach."

"Any idea who spotted them?"

"The call was anonymous. We put our local branch on it. There was no question about her wearing the Blues. She

seems to have been either ignorant of their value or a complete idiot. I incline toward the former."

"What was the saloon?" Shayne asked.

"A place called the Red Rooster, just off Biscayne Boulevard. Know it?"

"I've heard of it," said the redhead. "What else did your local branch dig up?"

"The woman either met or was picked up by a man there. After that, nothing." Another pause, then, "The Red Rooster is hardly the sort of place in which stones of such value are usually worn."

Shayne nodded. He knew the joint. If anything, his employer had understated the case. The Red Rooster was a hangout for minor sporting characters, medium-price call girls, all-around raffish types. Definitely not a place to sport a million dollars' worth of spectacular stones.

G. Patchen went to the desk, picked up a sealed envelope, offered it to him, said, "Your retainer is inside. Since it's in cash, I'll have to ask you to sign a receipt."

Cool, he thought as he signed it. She had been that sure of him even before meeting him. He felt something close to wonder in the face of such confidence.



He said, "How many people know I'm on it?"

She said, "Hayes Wetherbee, our executive vice president, the two who just left here and me. None of us is going to talk. Our jobs depend on silence. Also the client. She wants them back, so she'll be quiet."

"I hope so," Shayne replied. Five people, he thought, was about five more than he liked under the conditions. He said, "When did the gem-sighting occur?"

She said, "We got the call Wednesday morning, so it happened Tuesday night. Around midnight, according to our informant."

"Anything else?" he asked.

She shook her beautiful head, said, "That's it. I'll expect

to hear from you here at least once a day, at ten A.M. Immediately, of course, if something breaks."

"I'll keep in touch," he promised.

"Rots of ruck," she said by way of dismissal. "You'll need it."

That rocked him—'rots of ruck.' As he rode down in the hotel elevator, it occurred to him that she had nearly kept him back on his heels all the way. A most alarming phenomenon. He patted the reassuring thickness of the envelope in his inside breast pocket. Five grand, he thought, was five grand.

He extricated his car from the mazelike underground garage and drove the causeway back to his office on Flagler Street in Miami proper. After stashing his loot-laden envelope in the wall safe behind the filing case he told Lucy Hamilton to wrap up for the day.

Then he said, "How about splitting a chateaubriand with me tonight?"

Lucy Hamilton's wide set blue eyes widened with surprise. She said, "Whatever have I done to deserve such largesse at current inflated prices?"

"Don't ever look a gift steak in the mouth," Shayne said. "Yes or no?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" Lucy

Hamilton replied. Rising, she deposited a quick kiss on his lips before moving into the washroom. He waited, pondering the problem confronting him and wondering how, whatever his luck, he could manage to keep it quiet. Also, disturbing and unbidden, what G. Patchen would be like to make love to. G. Patchen—what in hell was her first name? He had not the slightest idea.

The Red Rooster, as befitted its sporting theme, featured fumed oak panelling, banquettes of red leather, wrought iron light fixtures, photographic blowups of major athletic events superimposed on walls of reclaimed brick, plus an aroma of good beef and good alcohol. Mike Shayne had been there three times before but never for dinner.

They sat in a corner banquette from which the detective could get a fair angle of the bar activity via the backbar mirror. Lucy, who was on a sherry kick, ordered Oleroso while Shayne went for his usual Martell and soda.

The drinks were what they purported to be, which was fitting at one-fifty a throw, and the chateaubriand, when it came, was succulent, charcoal black on the outside and rich red within. The big baked potatoes were rich with melted

butter and the salad, crisp and appetizing.

As she finished, the red-head's girl Friday leaned back against the red leather and patted the all but non-existent convexity of her tummy. She sighed. "I must have put on five pounds," Lucy said.

Shayne did not reply. His attention was fixed on the backbar mirror, more specifically on the reflection of a little man who might have been labeled mousy save for the bright red of his sunburned face and the loud splash of his black and white houndstooth sports jacket.

He had been trying to catch the detective's eye since shortly after they sat down, but Shayne had ignored him until his meal was finished.

Now, meeting the intensity of that mirrored gaze, he nodded slightly, turned to Lucy, said, "What?"

"I said I must have put on five pounds."

"You can use it," said Shayne heartlessly, "as long as it goes to the right places." Then, before she could come up with a fitting retort, "Hello, Dopey. Long time no see."

Dopey Jackson hesitated until the redhead motioned him to sit down. Close up, he looked like a chocolate fudge sundae topped by a large

marischino cherry. He glanced at Lucy, looked questioningly at the detective, his eyes blinking with the nervous twitch that had won him his long-time nickname.

Shayne said, "It's okay, Dopey. This is my secretary. Lucy, Dopey Jackson."

"Pleased to meet you," said the newcomer in an unexpected bass drum of a voice. Then, to Mike, "You don't get around here very often."

"Okay, Dopey." The detective picked up the ball. "What have you got for me?"

Dopey hesitated, blinking rapidly. "That depends," he said. "Are you here on pleasure or business?"

"Okay, Dopey," said Shayne. "Spill it." And, when the informer continued to fidget, "You know you'll get the going rate."

Still Jackson hesitated, blinking. Then, with a deep breath, he seemed to make up his mind. "It was last Tuesday, not late, around eleven-seventeen, this blonde comes in. Nothing remarkable, not too bad, but used. Know what I mean?"

"I think so. How old?"

"Maybe thirty-five, maybe forty. With the stuff they got nowadays, who can tell? Like I said, just a broad. She takes off her coat when she sits down,

and she's wearing them, and they were no paste jobs, believe me. Even from the bar, I knew she had more money around her neck than you and I together will ever have in one place."

"Who was she?" Shayne asked sharply.

"That's something a lot of people would like to know, judging the way they been asking around here since."

"Do you know, Dopey?" Shayne asked. And, when the informer shook his head, "That would be worth half a C." He made a move as if to summon their waiter, but Jackson stayed him with a nervous hand on his sleeve.

"I know who she met, Mr. Shayne," said Dopey, dropping his bass drum voice to snare drum level. "And I know where they went."

"Dopey," said the redhead, "You're a peeping Tom."

"I have to be or I don't eat," The words were spoken without a trace of embarrassment. "That should be worth at least a C."

They settled for seventy-five. Only then did the informer reveal what he knew. The man and woman had visited a motor hotel two blocks away, going to room 217, where they had remained for an hour. Then the man had left—alone—and driven

away in a small but costly Maserati.

"And get this, Mr. Shayne," said the red-faced little man. "It was Danny Davis. He was wearing his hair to his shoulders and soup-plate sized shades, but it was Danny all right."

Lucy Hamilton, lost in thoughts of her potentially expanding waistline, had been paying little attention to the colloquy. But the name of Danny Davis got through to her and she sat bolt-upright in the banquette.

"Dave the Wave?" she said. "Why, I thought he—"

"Well, he ain't," said Dopey Jackson. "He beat the rap like he always does."

"How?" said Lucy. "I thought they had him dead to rights with that pawn ticket swindle."

"The broad wouldn't testify," said the informer.

"How long had Danny been in town?" Shayne asked.

"So help me, that was the first time I knew he was back."

"Okay, Dopey," said Shayne. "Drop by the office tomorrow when you get up. Lucy will give you your money if I'm not there."

He cut short Jackson's effusive thanks and, after his departure, said, "Will Gentry must be biting nails."

A borderline rascal with

ingenuity to match his vast likability, Danny Davis had made the hard-worked and hard-working Miami police force wear egg on its collective countenance each time that body tried to put a crimp in his seldom legal freewheeling operations. Following the pawn ticket embroglio which had involved Danny's acquiring some twenty thousand dollars' worth of furs via redeeming a more or less wealthy woman's ticket for less than a tenth of that sum and reselling them at a considerable profit, Chief Gentry had forbidden him to set foot ever again within the borders of Dade County or face a roughing up and instant deportation.

It looked to Shayne as if Danny and the Barton Blues had arrived in Miami together or at least so close together in time that, coupled with their Red Rooster rendezvous, coincidence was hard to accept. Danny "Dave the Wave" Davis represented an unforeseen and unwelcome new factor in a case as yet unfolded—not merely because Davis was both ingenious and unscrupulous but because his flare for publicity amounted to genius.

There, the detective thought grimly, goes thirty-three and a third percent!"

"Lucy," he said, "I'm afraid

you're going to have to take a cab home."

"I might have known," the girl said disconsolately.

"Don't beef," Shayne said heartlessly. "At least you put on five pounds first."

II

THE MORRO CASTLE Motor Hotel was a drab looking resort in the bilious glare of its own neon sign. Two stores high, it consisted of three sides of a rectangle with the open end on the street. A well lighted wooden balcony made the round of its interior, overlooking an unoccupied swimming pool in the middle. The parking area was below and in back, reached by a ramp along the west side of the structure.

After leaving his car in a parking space on the street, Mike Shayne surveyed it carefully from a shadowed area close to the gate. Lights showed dimly from a number of windows with drawn blinds on both stories as well as from the rectangle of the door with an electric sign above it labeled *Office*. The detective thought it looked rather like a smaller Fort Sumter.

There appeared to be nobody moving about, so he went in, turning to the right to avoid being spotted by anyone in the

motel office. He wanted to take a look at Number 217 himself before asking questions downstairs. Reaching the second floor balcony without incident, he found the doorway he wanted on the closed south side of the structure, close to the nearest corner.

The door was ajar with a dim light beyond it. Either there was somebody inside or somebody expected back or both. After a moment's hesitation and reflex check of the flat Remington automatic .38 in his armpit holster, the redhead knocked on the door. When there was no response in some thirty seconds, he pushed on through.

There was somebody inside.

The man lay on his back on the far side of the unmade bed. He was naked save for a pair of baby blue jockey shorts. He was paunchy and white, without a trace of suntan, and his toenails needed clipping. His balding head gleamed an answer to the reading light attached to the head of the bedstead, the room's only illumination. His brown eyes were wide open, staring at the ceiling, but they weren't seeing anything.

He was very thoroughly dead, a fact attested to by the wooden handled kitchen carving knife whose upper blade and hilt protruded from his

chest. The all but total absence of blood, combined with the fact that the weapon had been driven home cleanly to the heart without glancing off either ribs or breastbone indicated either an expert job or a very lucky thrust.

The room had been ransacked with nothing returned to its proper place. Cushions, clothing, even the wall-to-wall carpet had been slashed systematically. A well worn black leather wallet had been ripped in two and its contents—cards, money, receipted bill stubs—had been dumped on the raped mattress alongside the body.

The redhead bent to scoop up the cards. It was a gesture that saved his life. Even as he stooped, there was a soft, evil, plop from behind him and a bullet whined mere inches above his left ear to thud jarringly into the lath-backed plaster of the wall beyond the bed.

Shayne's actions in the crucial split seconds that followed were strictly spurred by conditioned reflex. He kept right on bending down, converting the relatively passive act into a head-first dive that carried him over bed and corpse alike, to land jarringly against the base of the far wall. Even as he did so, his right hand snaked the Remington from its holster

and, immediately after he hit wall and carpet, a flick of his thumb slipped the safety catch off.

Silently, he slid along the carpet toward the head of the bed, planning to use its presumably stout frame as partial cover while he exposed himself briefly to take a potshot at his attacker. But another *plop*, followed by the slam of another bullet, this one into the bedstead, almost in his face, informed him that he was pinned down.

Shayne had been under fire too often in his long career to panic. But his adrenals were pumping furiously and he was coldly determined to return at least as good as he got, no matter what the outcome. He knew death was at his elbow and, if he was tapped, he had no intention of making the long trip alone.

His mind was functioning with the speed and precision of a perfectly programmed computer. He had made no sound audible above the city night noises that surrounded him as he made his slight move. Nor had he actually lifted his head or any other part of his body into visibility from the doorway.

So how had his move been observed? Good question; he thought wryly, as he crouched

in the corner of the room and looked warily about him within the narrowly restricted range of vision his position permitted. In less than a second, he had the solution.

Once again, it was a mirror, this one a square glass set against the wall facing the foot of the bed above a crimson painted bureau whose drawers had been removed and their sparse contents dumped on the carpet. Inevitably, he recalled his recent eye-communication with Dopey Jackson via the backbar mirror of the Red Rooster.

This mirror was hung from the wall, tilting outward just enough to give anyone using the doorway at least a partial view of what lay behind the bed—in this instance, one Michael Shayne.

Similarly, it gave Mike Shayne at least a partial view of the doorway.

It did the redhead little good. Save that he could see there was *somebody* there, presumably male and certainly armed, all he could identify was less than half of a slim body, topped by a face shadowed by the brim of the hat he wore. Shayne moved sideways, away from the wall, in an effort to get a fuller view, then ducked as his attacker's hand moved upward and another silenced

bullet drilled a hole in the wall behind him.

The redhead thought longingly of the dear dead days when a pistol silencer had to be unscrewed and the gases allowed to escape before it could be re-attached for a second firing. Human ingenuity at weapons, goaded by the needs of World War Two, had brought such relatively halcyon days to an untimely end.

To improve the situation, Shayne took quick aim at the bed reading light just above him.

With that eliminated, his would-be murdered on the balcony would be in brighter illumination than his target—and the mirror reflection should do him little good.

But, just as his index finger tightened on the trigger of the Remington, he found himself unable to squeeze it.

If he fired his pistol, unsilenced, there was bound to be an alarm. Chief Will Gentry's police juggernaut would be set in motion. Almost inevitably, with Shayne involved in a motel shooting, there would be publicity, fanned for maximum circulation by his ace-reporter friend, Tim Rourke of the *Miami News*. Rourke was loyal in all but one respect. Where a news story was concerned. By his own oft-voiced admission,

he would sell his own mother cheerfully.

With the spotlight on Shayne and, inevitably, the body on the bed, it seemed unlikely that the theft of the Barton Blues would remain long under wraps, to say nothing of the fouled up efforts toward negotiation of their return to their rightful owner.

Once again, as with the arrival in Miami of Danny Davis, it seemed stretching coincidence much too far that the corpse just above him and the jewel robbery should not be closely connected.

Another bullet, this one grazing the tip of his left ear, caused Shayne to crouch lower. From the angle, the would-be assassin must have moved inside the room. Crouching even lower behind the bed, the redhead decided he was going to have to risk loss of his as yet unearned O. & W. fee or be ignominiously slain like the proverbial rat in its hole. There was no other way.

This time, his crouch was so low that his eye-level was below the bottom of the bed. Against the base of the wall, well within reach, he spotted an electric light outlet with a plug in it. From the plug, an insulated cord rose to vanish behind the bedstead.

Swiftly, Shayne extended his left hand and yanked the plug



from the outlet. Instantly, the semi-darkness of the room became deeper. He slid on his belly to the foot of the bed and cautiously half-rose to peer around it.

His attacker, his slim shape outlined sharply by the light from the balcony, had advanced almost to the bed itself, was prepared for a final and fatal shot. Probably, the redhead's failure to return his fire had convinced him that the detective was unarmed.

It was time for Shayne to make his move. As his would-be slayer, briefly baffled by the relative darkness, bent over the grisly object on the bed, pistol

hand extended, the detective slithered behind him and, grabbing him by both ankles, pulled his feet out from under him. The man uttered a cry of consternation and his silenced gun went off once again, this time putting an unneeded bullet into the corpse.

Shayne brought his own weapon down hard on the man's right wrist, causing him to cry out again and drop his weapon. The detective scrambled to his feet and stepped back to punch the main light switch and deal face to face with his unidentified assailant. He had kicked the silenced gun under the bed during the brief scuffle and was between the man and the door, thus cutting off his retreat.

But the stranger recovered before the redhead could locate the switch. Instead of trying to get past the redhead, he lunged away from him. He smashed through the window without bothering to open it and disappeared in a hideous crash of glass.

Seeking to discover what had happened to his assailant, Shayne made the broken window just in time to see a slim male figure vanish around a corner of the alley. He was clinging to the crane on a tow-truck that had evidently been parked underneath, evi-

dently with a view to carting the body away.

Briefly, the detective wondered how and why anyone engaged in such a resourceful operation should leave the room with the door ajar and the corpse still on the bed. He filed it for future reference as sounds outside the room made him aware that his own situation remained precarious.

He moved quickly to the door, shut it and locked it within three seconds, not forgetting to affix the chain bolt. His would-be slayer's noisy exit through the window had roused the building. If he were caught here with the corpse, Shayne knew he could kiss G. Patchen's thirty-three-and-a-third percent a fond farewell.

While the drop from the window to the alley beneath was long, it was not prohibitive. He had already computed it at about sixteen feet. Since he was over six feet tall, if he hung by his fingertips before letting go, he would cut this distance in half.

In the semi-darkness, just as cries and a hammering began from the balcony, he spotted a towel that lay on the carpet near the bathroom door. Scooping it up, he moved to the window and, using the butt of his gun, swept three feet of the

sill free of broken glass. Then, for good measure, he folded the towel and laid it in triple thickness upon the bottom frame.

Being a cheap motel, it was not very thick but it did the trick. Although the force of his landing on the alley pavement jarred him from heels to head, it did not slow him down. He got well away and made his car parked outside unpursued. There he regained his composure and lit a cigarette.

A few minutes later, Shayne heard police sirens. Starting his motor, he waited until he saw the red rotor lights in his rearview mirror, then put the car in gear and drove quietly from the scene.

Since the hour was still well short of midnight, the redhead was in no mood to go home. He needed a drink.

The smart thing would be to visit his secretary and unwind with her. But he knew Lucy, uptight on learning of his narrow squeak that neither of them would be able to relax. So he settled for the Golden Cock, a mere ten minute drive from his own apartment hotel on East Second Avenue, where he was long known.

There, alone in a rear booth over a Martell and soda, Shayne pondered the puzzle confronting him. Who in hell, for one

thing, was or had been the man on the bed in Room 217 of the Morro Castle Hotel? Who was the man who had tried and failed, with at least one confederate, to derrick the body through the window and had nearly killed the detective in the process? Who in hell had the Barton Blues?

Last but not least, what was Danny Davis's involvement in the case?

The only one of the four he could answer was the second, and that was merely an educated guess. G. Patchen had mentioned the involvement of the Joe Visconti mob in the original theft. Incidentally, her sparse account of the robbery had left a smell in his nostrils. A brief blackout at a gala society affair and the jewels heisted before the lights went on again.

How could there be a "legitimate" blackout as G. Patchen had indicated under the circumstances? There had to be well-oiled inside help if not victim cooperation. It seemed unlikely, to say the least, that an insurance firm as successful and efficient as O. & W. could overlook such a glaring implausibility. Therefore...

Therefore... *what?*

One reason why the redhead had selected that particular rear booth in the Golden Cock was

for the privacy it afforded him. The other was because it was one of the two such booths equipped with a telephone jack. When he flagged Audrey, the pert brunette waitress, for a refill, he asked her to bring him a phone.

Telling the toll operator to charge the call to his home number, Shayne called Joe Friezell, person to person, in New York City. He was lucky enough to get him.

"Joe," he said when the amenities were concluded, "why didn't you pick up the Barton Blues case? You can't be that busy."

"I'm not," said Friezell.

"Then why? There's good loot in it."

"If," replied the New Yorker, "you can stay alive to collect it and if you can recover the stones. It's too hot for me, Mike, that's all."

"That hot?"

"That hot. I take it that green-eyed she-Dracula got to you. She's awfully hard to say no to."

"She got to me, Joe," said Mike Shayne feeling grim. "Anything you know I should know?"

"Just that it stinks to heaven. I must say I admire your nerve. I wouldn't want to muck around with anything involving Joe Visconti and his

goons, not for a million bucks. Half a million, anyway."

"Collaboration?" Shayne asked.

"Hell, Mike, there has to be. That's another reason I didn't want in. Not with a broad like Doris Barton involved."

"What's with her, Joe?"

"She's a kook. A beautiful kook but a kook. Hell, you must have known her, Mike. Known of her, anyway. She used to dance in one of the clubs there as Doris Reilly."

"Oh, no!" Shayne remembered Doris Reilly. A golden blonde with the face of an angel and the body of a siren. Ten years before she had been riding the crest of a tidal wave as an entertainer, a wave that had aborted because of her incurable addiction to gambling. The redhead had taken it for granted, when she vanished from the scene leaving a paper snowstorm of losing bookies' tickets behind her, that she had gone down the drain like so many others.

He said, "Can you tell me where to reach her, Joe?"

"Sorry. But I've got a hunch she's somewhere in your bailwick. Don't ask me where, I don't know."

"How come O. & W. is holding the tab on her rocks? I shouldn't think they'd touch them with an eleven-foot pole."

"Because they're not hers. They're part of her husband's estate. O. & W.'s been carrying the policy for years. They've been trying to cancel but they're still trapped in their own iron-bound clauses. And Everard Barton's position is unassailable."

"Where did the return deal go off the track, Joe?"

"Don't ask me," said Friezell again. "I backed off without looking into that."

"I don't blame you," said Shayne.

"Rots of ruck, Mike," said the New Yorker before hanging up, reminded the redhead inescapably of G. Patchen's parting salvo.

All of which, he decided, left him with more unanswered questions than the four he had listed previous to making the call. Now Doris Reilly was directly implicated, albeit as Doris Barton, nominal owner of the fabulous Blues. He gave G. Patchen the benefit of the doubt as to awareness of the gambling addiction and character of the long retired dancer.

His anger slowly mounted. Patchen had to know why Joe Friezell had refused to touch the case, and it was not because of other business "up to here." He dialed her Miami Beach hotel, to be informed by a house operator that Miss

atchen was not to be reached via the house telephone.

Shayne considered taking a run across the bay unannounced, decided against it. His encounter with the green-eyed J. & W. executive would have to wait until the morrow. He had about decided to withdraw from the case, keeping his five grand retainer as recompense for his near scrape with death on her company's behalf.

At that point, looking up to lag Audrey for a refill, he potted the lanky, towering frame of his raffish pal Tim Rourke of the Miami News at the bar. The reporter, as usual, was asking the bartender if there were any messages for him before settling down for another or two of serious drinking.

Shayne debated beckoning Rourke over and telling him the events of the past few hours. In all probability, he could at least obtain through Rourke the identity of the corpse in Room 217 of the Morro Castle Motel, and without becoming embroiled with Will Gentry and his hired men.

But something held him back. Until he saw G. Patchen, he was still nominally in her employ and the conditions of their agreement still bound him. With a sign, he waved Audrey away, slapped a five dollar bill on the table and slid out

through the rear of the side door while the reporter was still involved with the bartender.

Parked in the garage beneath his apartment hotel, he moved warily, loosening the safety of his automatic and ready for instant retaliation should anyone be lurking in the shadows with ambush in mind. He heaved another sigh, one of silent relief, when he reached the elevator without incident.

Hence, he was unprepared when, after pushing inside his apartment, he found the lights were on. Dropping to a crouch, he had the Remington out in a fraction of a second, ready for instant action.

"For Christ's sake, Mike, put that damn thing away," said a deep, too-familiar voice.

Danny Davis lay stretched out on the sofa, flipping him an insouciant greeting.

III

WHAT ANNOYED Mike Shayne even more than his flamboyant unbidden visitor's presence was the fact that he had helped himself to the \$18 jar of beluga caviar from his freezer and unerringly dug the last of Shayne's special 1882 Napoleon brandy from the well hidden undershelf of his liquor closet. The evidence lay damningly on the glass-topped

coffee table in front of the sofa, the jar virtually empty, the bottle two-thirds gone.

But then, Dave the Wave had a well-earned reputation for living off the fat of the land—invariably someone else's fat. Shayne wished he had got home earlier.

"You certainly took your time," the intruder said, adding injury to insult.

Shayne's Irish temper exploded and he plucked the costly food and drink from the table. Having done so, he was left standing foolishly over his visitor with both hands loaded—and the smirk on Danny Davis's face told him he had fallen for a typical outrageous Dave-the-Wave put-on.

Recovering his poise quickly, the detective returned the comestibles to the coffee table and said, "For two cents I'd pistol whip you before calling Will Gentry and telling him you're in town."

Davis waved that away with a casually cavalier gesture, said, "Willie the Weeper already knows I'm in town. I made certain of that. But he doesn't know where I am."

"What's to stop me from telling him?" Shayne's temper was still barely leashed.

"The Barton Blues," Davis replied, "plus a fine fat fee for their return."

"Do you have them?" the detective asked bluntly.

"No." Dave the Wave poured four fingers of priceless brandy into a tumbler and filled the rest of the glass with warm ginger ale, causing Shayne's stomach to vibrate sickeningly as he downed it without a tremor.

Then Davis sat up, ran a stubby hand through already tousled brown hair, said, "Unh-unh, Mike. But I could make an educated guess who has. A very educated guess."

Wearily, the detective sat down. Conversations with Danny Davis, he recollected, had a way of turning into a game of cat and mouse, with Davis playing the feline role. He would learn exactly what his visitor wished him to learn, no more, no less. Shayne was tempted to throw him out on his ear and to hell with him.

But the temptation of what the rascal might know was too much, as Davis had already nicely calculated. He eyed Shayne across the coffee table as if considering ways and means.

Dave the Wave was far from handsome. He was thick of middle, jowly of face, slightly under average height. He had discarded the tinted shades, which rested on the table in front of him, and his eyes were

puffy and slightly under blood-shot. His tan-pink slacks were wrinkled, his jacket rumpled, his turtleneck adorned with globs of caviar. He looked like a slob of slobs.

Yet this post-dated juvenile had been catnip to women ever since Shayne could remember, and his memories ran back further than ten years. He treated them abominably. He robbed them of their hard-earned or inherited funds as if their assets were his birthright. He made love to them, not infrequently impregnated them and ran out. He used them for pleasure and profit, and they invariably came crawling back for more.

One thrice-defrauded Miami Beach divorcee Shayne remembered, after tearfully refusing to press charges against her multiple betrayer, had said in his hearing, "I just can't. I couldn't bear the thought of him in trouble."

A fuming Will Gentry, also on the scene, had said, "Lady, hasn't he caused *you* enough trouble—to say nothing of hocking your jewels and blowing the money on the ponies?

"I know, I know. But he would have taken me to Europe if he'd won," she insisted. After another pause as pregnant as her person, "Dave's like a naughty little boy. You can't

help loving him for his tricks."

"Maybe you can't help loving him!" The Miami Chief of Police had exploded. "But I don't love him. The sooner I know he's behind bars, the sooner I'll feel happy."

Nor had Davis's behavior since that frustrating occasion caused Chief Gentry to modify his view. The best he had been able to do was sentence him to unofficial exile from Dade County, but now not even that mild sentence had proved effective.

"Okay, Dave," said Shayne. "What's your deal?"

"You always were blunt," was the reply. "No finesse. But okay, here it is."

Davis downed another warm blend of brandy and ginger ale before he mentioned it.

It sounded simple enough. Shayne was to get in touch with G. Patchen and arrange a return of the Barton Blues for no less than two hundred thousand dollars, collect the reward and split it with Danny Davis right down the middle. Dave the Wave would be in touch with him by telephone here at his apartment at exactly noon and would then arrange the details of the trade.

It sounded simple enough on the surface, but there were a number of hints, at least to the detective, that it was not quite

as simple as it seemed. For one thing, it suggested that Davis knew exactly the terms of Shayne's contract with O. & W. The redhead considered inquiring into this puzzle, decided against it. He could probably get the answer more reliably from G. Patchen herself.

"Danny," he said, "if that's all you want, why in hell didn't you rig the deal with Joe Friezell or somebody in New York? Why the hehira down here, and why me?"

"That's three questions, Mike, but I'll try to answer them. New York was out if only because Joe Visconti and his boys thought they had the deal sewed up there. And those boys can be very hard to handle, especially when you've taken their sugar. The other answers stem directly from that one."

"What if I take the money and hold out on you?" Shayne asked.

"You won't," said Davis, "because you've got to take the deal. You're one of the few living men I know I can trust."

Shayne said, at the moment detesting his hard earned reputation for being a man of integrity, "I'll have G. Patchen here at noon then. You can confirm with her. And you'd better have the Blues ready."

"They'll be ready." Again

the smirk appeared on the intruder's lips and again the redhead felt that he was being had.

He said, "Just how did you get in here, Danny?"

Davis regarded him reproachfully, said, "You know better than to ask such a question, Mike."

At that instant, there was a loud knocking on the front door of Shayne's apartment. Both men started, both knew by instinct and experience it was the law.

Davis rose swiftly from the sofa, said, "You didn't call them, did you, Mike?"

Shayne, also on his feet, shook his head. "I didn't even know you were here, Danny. If I had, I might have called them." (19)

Davis moved to a window, opened it. He paused in the act of straddling the sill, said, "Any idea why they're here?"

Shayne said, "Maybe. I found a very dead man on a bed in the Morro Castle Motel."

"Yipes!" cried Dave. "I didn't think they'd—"

Whatever else he meant to say remained unspoken. Another knock shook the doorframe and Dave the Wave disappeared through the window. Shayne counted to ten, then went to the apartment door and opened it. He was not

surprised to see the hulking form of Detective Lieutenant Len Sturgis abaft his threshold. The deputy chief of Miami's Homicide Bureau did not look as if he had come on a purely social visit.

Shayne stood aside and invited the detective in but Sturgis remained adamantly outside the threshold. He said, "Gentry wants to see you."

"And he sent you as his errand boy?" countered the redhead. "I feel honored."

Shayne knew perfectly well why Sturgis refused to come inside. It meant he did not have a warrant to do so and had no desire to give the redhead any legitimate cause for complaint. The redhead had every intention of complying with Will Gentry's request, stalled only to give Danny Davis time to complete his getaway.

As he returned after getting his hat, he said, "Aren't you going to read me my rights, Lieutenant?"

"Oh, shut up," Sturgis said wearily. "This is not an arrest."

He did not add what he obviously felt, that he wished it were an arrest. Although each respected the other's professional abilities, Shayne and Sturgis had never got along. The Homicide detective resented the fees Shayne received for doing what Sturgis felt should be



police work. He also resented the redhead's wide publicity and status as a genuine Miami celebrity, to say nothing of his close friendship with Chief Will Gentry.

As usual, the Miami Chief of Police looked tired. In shirt-sleeves and with collar open, he resembled an angry bull as he harangued Shayne across the broad expanse of his desk. The two men were having it out alone, something else that had

annoyed the Homicide lieutenant.

"God damn it, Shayne!" Chief Gentry roared. "All I want to know is what you were doing there and why you didn't report the murder?"

For the fifth time, Shayne replied, "I went there on a tip that Danny Davis might be there and I wanted to talk to him."

"Bull!" said Gentry, slamming a fist down so hard the blotter jumped half an inch under the vibration the impact on the desk top set up. "You have no more reason to love Danny Davis than I do."

"Love didn't enter into it," said the redhead.

The big vein in Gentry's left temple throbbed. He took a deep breath, visibly fought for control, said, "So why did you want to see that S.O.B.?"

"You know better than to ask that, Will," Shayne said mildly.

Gentry buried his massive face in his hands, said through them, "Then why didn't you report the body?"

"One," the redhead replied sweetly, "because I was doing my damndest not to get shot by a person, male, unknown. Two, because your men were on the scene before I could get to a phone."

Chief Gentry lifted his

still-red face, said, "You could have called from the room. There was a phone there, I believe."

"Will!" said the redhead in gentle reproof. "I happen to be a busy man."

"Why won't you cooperate?"

"But I am cooperating," Shayne insisted. "At least I've cleared up the little matter of why the dead man was shot after he was already stabbed. Won't you give me credit for saving some time and therefore taxpayer's money at the mortuary?"

The chief said, shaking his head, "What I don't see is why a petty one-time thief like Phil Wentworth should be worth murdering. A motel manager in Islip, Long Island, who absconded with the rents and drove down here—and with his own wife, yet!"

Shayne thought that one over. The name Phil Wentworth meant nothing to him. Then he remembered the blonde who, according to Dopey Jackson, had met Danny Davis at the Red Rooster two nights earlier.

He said, "The wife—do you know if she's a blonde, a faded blonde?"

Gentry's eyes narrowed. He said, "She's a blonde by all descriptions, how faded I wouldn't know. Right now

we've got an A.P.B. out on her. How did you know that?"

"I suspect from the same source that told you I was in the Morro Castle Motel," said Shayne. "A motel managing couple from Islip, Long Island..." He thought that one over, added, "If you're in touch with the police up there, you might ask them if a man named Danny Davis or anyone who looked like Danny Davis recently left the place."

Chief Gentry frowned, then picked up the telephone and gave brief instructions. Then he sat back and regarded the redhead more benevolently. He said, "I don't know where this is getting us, but I'm not going to ask."

"I don't know either," said Shayne. "It's just a wild hunch."

Actually, it was more than a hunch. Knowing Danny Davis as he did, it was the only pattern that would fit the facts at his disposal. Dave the Wave was no more a mastermind capable of rigging a theft like that of the Barton Blues than he was an expert surfer. But, just as his nickname had come from the wildness of his surfing spills, so he was capable of stepping into someone else's setup and making waves, usually to his own profit.

Danny Davis was a superb

opportunist who could scent out a susceptible dollar or woman seemingly from miles away. Shayne had a hunch that, if he knew whom to ask for, he could have the name, or at least an alias, of the actual thief. A second-rate motel on Long Island made a superb hideout for a man with a bagful of ultra-hot rocks. He could wait there with them until the negotiations were complete, then turn them over to go-between, take the money and stroll away.

The one factor the thieves had failed to reckon on was an amiable trickster in residence named Danny Davis. He would have spotted the crook, have connected him with the theft of the Barton Blues. Five to one, Shayne thought, he would have had the manager's wife in his pocket and egged the couple into robbing their tenants and landlord and taking off for Miami. There, Danny had undoubtedly told them, he had connections.

Small wonder, the redhead thought, that the absconding manager's wife had worn the Blues to her rendezvous with Davis at the Red Rooster, thus putting the fat in the fire once again and undoubtedly leading to her husband's murder by the original thieves or by their local emissaries. She probably had

not had the slightest idea of their value, Shayne suspected.

Something had scared Danny Davis into making the offer to him. And somebody had come into Room 217 of the Morro Castle Motel and left the door ajar, probably after the killer or killers had committed their crime, searched the room and left to get the tow truck with which they evidently had intended to remove their victim, probably to dump him to the sharks out at sea. Either Davis or the blonde. . .

The redhead didn't believe Davis was any more capable of committing such a cold-blooded murder than that he was capable of arranging the original theft of the Barton Blues.

Chief Gentry said, "I wonder what in hell Davis is doing in Miami."

Shayne said, "Everybody he can, as always. He's been on the hustle ever since I've known him."

The burly Chief of Police stabbed the redhead with his bright blue Irish eyes, said, "Just make sure he doesn't catch you in one of his ploys when you're not looking. I'd hate to have to make trouble for you, Mike."

"I'd hate to have you." Shayne rose, sensing dismissal. His tying the unfortunate Wentworths to Danny Davis

had got him off the official hook, if he was ever on it. He passed Len Sturgis in the anteroom, and waved him a genial good night.

He went home and called G. Patchen's hotel on the Beach and left a message for her to phone him when she got up. Then he undressed, took a hot shower and a brandy and unwound for the night. He used the precious Napoleon, a Christmas gift from a satisfied client, since Davis had already consumed two-thirds of it.

Shuddering as he downed it neat, he thought of Davis desecrating such precious stuff with warm ginger ale. Then he turned in and slept soundly for such of the night as remained. At least, he thought, neither police nor press had tied up Davis or the body of Philip Wentworth with the theft of the Barton Blues.

Getting G. Patchen to come to his apartment took some doing. She had only assented to make the trip over the causeway when the redhead insisted that her presence there was essential to recovery of the stones. Actually, he did want to stick close by his phone in case Davis called before noon, but his real reason lay in his desire to tackle the cool-shelled O. & W. executive on his home ground. He thought it might

give him a psychological edge.

It didn't. The slight dilation of elegant nostril with which she regarded the decor of the redhead's apartment was sufficient to settle that issue. Even though he was wearing slacks fresh from the cleaner's and a just-laundered blue pullover, he felt as if his fly were unzipped, and his clothing grimy.

She draped herself with the grace of a model on one side of the sofa, looked at him appraisingly, said, "Well?"

"Why," said Shayne angrily, "didn't you tell me Danny Davis was in this up to his eyeballs?"

She shrugged. "Because I wasn't sure it was he."

"And why did you tell me your client asked for me?"

"Because she did."

Shayne ran a hand through his thick wavy red hair, said, "But Doris Barton is not your client. Her husband is."

G. Patchen shrugged, then counterattacked with, "If you've dragged me over here for a blanket indictment or to tell me things I already know, you're wasting both our time and my client's money. Since I am here, I think you might give me an accounting of your actions since yesterday."

Shayne did so, pulling no punches. He told her of going to the Red Rooster, of Dopey

Jackson's tip, of the corpse in the Morro Castle Motel and his own near murder there, of his call to Joe Friezell, his visit from Danny Davis, his talk with Chief Gentry.

Growing angrier as he laid it out for her, he concluded with, "If you think I'm returning a single cent of the advance you hooked me with, forget it. I figure I've earned it twice over. And, you'll notice, without publicity for your precious client."

She said, "I believe you have."

Her failure to put up an argument caught him off-guard, brought his anger to a sudden halt. She added, "I suppose you have it all worked out."

"I could use some information as to how close I am. Having known Doris Reilly Barton, my guess is her husband forbade her gambling, but that didn't stop Doris. She got in hock to the Syndicate boys to the tune of a hundred gees or so, and couldn't pay up. So somebody suggested Joe Visconti and an arranged theft of the Barton Blues. All cut and dried like a thousand similar deals. But then Dave the Wave and the Wentworths got into the act and the whole thing blew up. Am I close?"

"Close enough," said G. Patchen.

"Then how in hell do I figure in it?" Shayne asked.

"Simple, Shayne," she said with another shrug. "In view of what has happened, my company feels it can trust neither of the parties involved in the theft, especially since last night's murder of Phil Wentworth has brought the Miami Police into it."

"Why not simply let the police do the dirty work?" the redhead asked. "They're a lot cheaper."

G. Patchen said, "If the police do recover the Blues, it will mean a major scandal—and Everard Barton, as board of chairman of a vast interlocking system of corporate directorates, can hardly afford to let it be known that his wife is addicted to ruinous gambling."

"He must be awfully fond of her," Shayne shook his head.

"She's Everard Barton's sole weakness," said G. Patchen. "He has her credit limit rigidly established at all known gambling resorts. But last month, while he was on an overnight business trip to Buenos Aires, she got trapped in a private game."

The redhead rose from the armchair in which he had been sitting and nodded. The rest was easy enough for him to read. He glanced at his wristwatch, discovered that it

was getting very close to noon.

They waited in silence for the hour. It came and passed by one minute, by two, by three. At five after, G. Patchen rose and said, "He's not going to call."

"Hold it," said Shayne. "Give him a little more time. Danny wasn't kidding last night."

"That was last night," G. Patchen said, her voice adrip with cynicism.

At that instant, the phone rang. Shayne picked it up. It was Danny Davis. He sounded breathless as he said, "Sorry, Mike, it's all fouled up. They've got Madelon. They're holding her down in a model house in Ocean Front Village. Get on down here. I need help."

The redhead hung up. Suddenly, he was aware of the dry, sophisticated spray cologne characteristic of his visitor. She was standing close beside him, her ear next to his. He put the phone down in the cradle, looked her eye to eye, said, "You heard?"

She nodded, brushed back her rust-red hair.

"I'm coming with you."

IV

MIKE SHAYNE looked at her with disbelief. He said, "You've got to be out of your mind."

A faint smile appeared on the thin lipped but perfect mouth. G. Patchen said, as if she were discussing an actuarial figure, "This Davis has the Blues."

"He says he has the Blues," said the detective. "The Visconti boys want them to get the return on Doris Reilly's—Doris Barton's—gambling debt. They've killed once and they'll kill again if they have to. You stay out of it."

"No dice," said the insurance executive. "I may be needed. After all, we can hardly call the police in now; that's for sure."

"What can we do?" snapped Shayne. As before, G. Patchen had a knack for making his hackles rise. Her assurance put him on the defensive.

"Hadn't we better be putting this show on the road?" she countered. "Your friend sounded pretty cut up."

The redhead gave in. After all, he could hardly give orders to his employer. He said, "It's your neck, beautiful. Come on, then."

Shayne knew where Ocean Front Village was. It lay some twenty-five miles south of Miami on reclaimed land between Homestead and Leisure City, close to the southern end of Biscayne Bay, within the shelter of Rhodes Key offshore.

Lying eastward of the highway that led to Florida City and, ultimately, to Key West, it had been promoted extensively and heavily.

The branch road from the highway was at least surfaced with tar as it wound between the dunes toward an indentation of the Atlantic that was more a cove than the ocean itself. Driving around a large dome of sand covered with coarse beach grass, they were confronted by a large sign that pointed ahead in the shape of an arrow. On its white surface, in flaming red letters, was the legend *Ocean Front City Model Homes*.

A dune buggy was pulled off the road immediately ahead of them. Danny Davis stepped from behind it to flag them down. He still wore, Shayne noted, the rumpled clothing of the night before. A dark twenty-four-hour stubble added little to the questionable attraction of his jowls.

He came over to them when Shayne stopped and looked at G. Patchen curiously. Then, to Shayne, he said, "Who's the broad?"

"This," said the detective, "is G. Patchen of O. & W. Miss Patchen, meet Danny Davis."

Neither of them acknowledged the introduction with words. Davis merely nodded

and rubbed his twenty-four-hour beard as he weighed the intrusion of another factor into the situation.

The redhead said, "What's the pitch, Danny?"

Davis said.

Like I told you on the phone, they've got Madelon Wentworth. They grabbed her from my pad last night while I was out."

Shayne said, "Miss Patchen knows about your visit, Danny. How'd you find her here?"

"They called me this morning. Told me to bring the Blues with me in an exchange for Madelon."

G. Patchen spoke for the first time.

"So what's holding it up?"

Dave the Wave looked at her incredulously.

"After what they did to her husband last night?" he asked.

"Do you think I'm that crazy?"

They won't let her go once they've got the rocks, and I'm not going to be responsible for her death if I can help it."

G. Patchen looked at Shayne. "Do you think they'll kill her?"

"Perhaps," said the redhead. Then, to Davis, "What do you have in mind?"

Dave the Wave nodded toward a cluster of four gaily painted small houses clustered at the far end of the spur road,

perhaps two hundred yards beyond them. Evidently these were the model homes customary at the rental stage of developments such as Ocean Front Village. Drawn up in front of them was a large glittering Cadillac.

He said, "There's only one way—get Madelon out of there. And it's not going to be easy. That's why I called you."

"How many of them are there?" the detective asked.

"I've counted three so far."

"That sounds about right," said Shayne, tugging at the lobe of his left ear. "What are they carrying?"

"At least one rifle, Mike."

As if to italicize this remark, a bullet whizzed dangerously close to the windshield of the redhead's car, burying itself harmlessly enough in the dune just behind them. It was followed by the faint but unmistakable *ka-powie* of a high-powered rifle shot.

G. Patchen said coolly, "Perhaps we'd better get out of the car."

She slid through the right hand door and the redhead followed her across the front seat since it was the left side of the vehicle that was exposed. Around them, the scene was unutterably peaceful in the soft glare of the slightly overcast afternoon sunshine.

Danny Davis said, "No need to worry, friends. The fellow can shoot. If he'd wanted to hit you, he would have."

By way of illustration, another high-velocity bullet arrived. This one did not whine harmlessly past, but struck viciously, contact followed by a loud report that preceded the *ka-powie* of the rifle intself.

"Son of a bitch!" growled Shayne. "They just blew my left front tire!"

"I told you the bastard could shoot," said Danny Davis, indicating the shredded left rear tire of the dune buggy.

Shayne crouched to keep out of sight of the house. Using his car for cover, he crawled into the rear seat, lifting the spring cushion and, working deftly despite the cramped awkwardness of his position, lifted out and assembled the components of a cherished Mannlicher's sniper's rifle with telescopic sight. Ordinarily, the redhead used the gun to shoot swamp creatures in the Everglades.

As he slapped the cartridge clip into place, G. Patchen said, "You're not going to kill him, are you?"

"I don't intend to. Not that it's not an excellent idea," said Shayne, his eyes light with anger. "It might react against Mrs. Wentworth if I did."



He had been looking at the model houses as the shot was fired, had spotted the glint of a rifle barrel through an upstairs window immediately before the flash. Now, taking careful position at the rear of the car so that he would be covered by the car itself while firing diagonally through its interior, he squinted through the fine-ground lenses of the telescopic sight.

Thanks to their magnifying power, he could make out clearly the torso, arms and heads of the marksman, just as he cradled his weapon against his cheek for a third harassing shot at the new arrivals. Calculating the slight wind drift, taking careful aim, Shayne fired first. He had the satisfaction of seeing the sniper throw up his hands and drop out of sight within the model house, while his rifle fell to the courtyard beneath.

"My God! You've killed

him!" breathed G. Patchen, regarding him round-eyed.

Shayne shook his head, said, "I hit his gun. I don't believe I killed him, though he may wish he was dead right now."

With two more quick shots, the redhead demolished both right tires of the long Cadillac, had the satisfaction of seeing them flatten instantly. He said, to no one in particular, "Two car play at that game. I doubt they have two rear tires."

"They can get away by boat," said Danny Davis. "There's a jetty behind the houses and a motor launch."

"They only hit one of my tires," Shayne told him, "and I do have a spare. So we are hardly immobilized."

G. Patchen spoke up. "I don't see how this is either getting the Blues back or the hostage's release. Both sides know the other can shoot. I think it's time for a parley."

"That's - my job," said Shayne, reaching for her to restrain her. But G. Patchen shook her coolly beautiful head.

She said, "The hell it is. I want you to cover me."

Waving a handkerchief in lieu of a flag of truce, the chic O. & W. executive stepped into the open. She moved fifty paces toward the houses, then stopped, an attractive, courageous figure in her blue and yellow

pants suit. While she stood there, Shayne kept the house covered as before.

He appreciated the shrewdness of G. Patchen's timing. She was making her move when, presumably, the Visconti mob's best available marksman was out of action and when Shayne had just given them a damaging example of precision sniping. However, he still doubted its validity.

In a few minutes, one of the kidnapers stepped out of a model house. Beside the redhead, Danny Davis evidenced signs of excitement.

He said, "Hey! That looks like Visconti himself."

"It is," said Shayne, who had recognized the long, dark, near-handsome countenance of the East Coast's most efficient jewel thief.

As the two conferees moved closer together, the detective wished he could read lips via his telescopic sight. The wind was light but offshore, sufficient to make every word they uttered inaudible.

After a brief verbal exchange, G. Patchen gestured toward the model homes. Visconti hesitated, then turned and called an order to his aides. After a few moments, in the open door of the model home from which the jewel thief had emerged, a woman appeared

with another man at her elbow.

She fitted perfectly Dopey Jackson's description of the woman who had worn the Barton Blues at the Red Rooster. Fortyish, once-pretty, slightly faded.

Through the gunsight, the redhead also recognized the man with her. His name was Leon Marcuse, and he was widely known in criminal and criminal investigative circles as an able hit man, a gun for hire.

Shayne was measuring the deviation of his notably broken septum when the rifle was rudely snatched from his grasp. Danny Davis moved around the rear of Shayne's car and began studying the more distant group through the sight.

"Hey!" said the redhead. "If you wanted a look, you could have asked for—"

Before he could finish the sentence, the Mannlicher barked almost in his ear, then again and again, before the hammer clicked on an empty chamber with the six-clip exhausted. Furiously, the detective grabbed his weapon back and dived into the rear of the car to procure a second clip of cartridges.

As he did so, he cursed Davis roundly for being seventeen kinds of a blundering fool.

"You jerk!" he concluded.

"What in hell did you do that for?"

Davis said, "I figured, if I could knock off the crumb with her while Visconti was out front and the other jerk was out of action—"

The rest of his sentence was unheard as a new round of shots sounded from the upper floor of one of the model houses, proving conclusively that the man whose gun Shayne had winged was very much back in action. At the first bark of gunfire, G. Patchen had flung herself flat on the sandy ground while Visconti headed for home, zigzagging in a low crouch that bespoke some G.I. training in his past.

Bullets from the thieves kicked up little spurts of sand around the insurance executive until Shayne, his own rifle reloaded, was able to put a couple of rounds into the window through which the opposing marksman was firing. With that, G. Patchen scrambled to her feet and regained the cover of the detective's car. She was pale with fury beneath the carefully donned tan of her complexion.

She said, losing her cool for the first time since the redhead had met her, "Who fired those shots?"

Danny Davis said, "I did. I didn't figure the guy in the

house was in condition to fire back."

G. Patchen said, "You bastard, you blew the whole deal. You may also have got your ladyfriend killed."

Shayne decided he would hate to have G. Patchen regard him with the open contempt she was regarding Dave the Wave. It also occurred to him that Davis's sudden activity might not have been as mindless as it seemed. By eliminating Visconti's boys, Davis would have been coppering his own deal against a possible split between the two groups by O. & W.

Why, the redhead wondered, had he not simply killed Visconti himself? Leaderless, it was unlikely that the other two mobmen would have put up much further resistance or have risked their own necks further by harming their hostage.

Then he remembered that, at the moment, G. Patchen would have been in the line of fire—and it was G. Patchen, or the company she represented, from whom all expected goodies were to flow. As it was, the situation had deteriorated into a Mexican standoff as a result of Davis seizing the bull by the horns. Nor did the fact that he had hit nobody render the dish more palatable.

Shayne decided it was time

he took charge. He lit a cigarette for the insurance woman, then said, "Danny, get lost. Go back to your dune buggy. Miss Patchen and I want to talk this out."

Davis hesitated, looked appealingly at G. Patchen, but received no sympathy from her—quite the reverse. Looking very much like a whipped cur, he scrambled from the cover of Shayne's car to the battered old sand wagon. That his recent activity had not promoted good will but rather the reverse was indicated when a pair of bullets all but nipped his heels during the few seconds he was in the open.

When he was out of earshot, G. Patchen said, "What do you have in mind, Shayne? We can't let them kill that damned broad. It would be lousy publicity for the company."

G. Patchen, the redhead decided, not without a certain admiration, had to be the hardest headed, coldest blooded female he had ever encountered. At least, however, one knew where he stood with her.

He lit himself a cigarette, then said, "I don't think they will. Without her, they've got nothing to bargain with. After all, our friend Davis has the rocks."

"So how do we handle them?"

"We wait till twilight," said the detective. "Then, with the shadows of the dunes for cover, we simply move in. I hardly think Visconti wants you killed any more than he wants Danny."

"What about you?"

He saluted her, said, "Your consideration is touching. But taking risks is part of the job. You cover me by sending an occasional rifle bullet their way, while I get close enough to go in. They won't expect me." He drew the Remington from his shoulder holster, added grimly, "With semi-darkness, surprise and this fellow on my side, I'm willing to take the chance. Do you know how to fire the Mannlicher?"

"I've won medals for marksmanship. Don't worry."

He barely suppressed a, "You would," as she took the rifle from him, handled it expertly. Then, using the car for cover as Shayne had, she squinted at the model houses through the telescopic sight.

She said, "According to the sign outside the office, those houses are supposed to rent from twenty-nine ninety-nine upward. The star model isn't worth more than twenty-two ninety-nine." A pause, then, "I wish I was in real estate."

The redhead felt grateful for the warmth of the afternoon.

Trapped with such a snow queen on a chill day, he had doubts of his survival. Idly, he wondered what G. Patchen would be like in bed. She was lean as a greyhound but he suspected she was sexy as hell when she got around to it.

As if reading his thoughts, she lowered the rifle and swung to look at him flintily. She said, "For now let's forget I'm a woman. Just how do you want me to cover you?"

Shayne explained in detail while they sat on the lee side of his car. It was while they were thus engrossed that the sudden sound of a car motor roaring to life startled them. Danny Davis, bullet torn flat and all, had made a U-turn and was taking off. Without looking back, he waved a hand in derisive farewell as he tooled his bouncing, limping sandmobile between the two dunes and out of sight.

Indicating that his departure had not passed unnoticed, Shayne heard the faint whine of a bullet, aimed not at them but at the departing Davis. Apparently, it missed its target, which was hardly surprising considering the distance involved.

G. Patchen said, "Did I see a phone in your car?"

The redhead nodded, said, "Be my guest."

G. Patchen crawled into the right front of the car and made a call. She issued crisp orders to have the highway watched and to tail Davis's vehicle when it was sighted.

"You have other detectives besides me?" he asked.

"We keep retainers in all large cities."

"Then why in hell did you come to me? Those boys are competent enough."

She said, "When we checked you out, we found you have a habit of coming up with the big ones. Frankly, we didn't want a large agency on this delicate a case. There are always leaks."

"Fair enough," said the detective. During the dwindling remainder of the long afternoon, they sat mostly in silence. Once, Shayne speculated on what in hell Danny Davis was up to. G. Patchen shrugged her elegant shoulders.

She said, "If he's up to anything, which I doubt, we'll hear from the agency."

"Don't underrate Danny," said Shayne. "That little habit has cost a lot of people. Sure, he's a hustler, but he has a real touch of genius now and then."

"He should put it to better use," said G. Patchen, effectively closing the door on the subject.

Thanks to the fact that the

two dunes were almost certainly the highest hills in the flattest state of the union, twilight shadows came early to the strip of sandy coastline on which the embryonic Ocean Front Village was situated. The redhead and the lady watched their deep dull purple growth eastward across the uneven sandy surface toward the small cluster of model homes in which their enemies lay snug.

The entire Ocean Front Village development had been suspended for some weeks while its promoters sought fresh money, offering an idea arena for a small private war. As Shayne readied his automatic and tested the catch, G. Patchen looked up at him and said, "Rots of ruck, Shayne. I'll open up when you get under the walls."

"Fire at the flashes if they open up on me," he told her. "I'll be going in anyway."

"You're a good man," she said. "Better than I suspected, Shayne. You get the broad and then we'll get Davis."

The redhead, moving slowly through the twilight's edge and sand, nearly made it to the model homes undetected. But when he was within about thirty yards of the stucco shelter of the house walls, he had the misfortune to place the heel of his left hand, with his



clipful of carefully spaced shots. Her aim was better than that of the men in the house. One of her shots broke a window just over his head, showering him with shattered glass—another thudded its ugly way into the rough stucco wall no more than a yard from the tip of his nose.

Shayne lay doggo, flat against the base of the house wall. He heard people moving about inside while they speculated on the nature of the attack.

"It's got to be Shayne doing the shooting," said one of the men.

"Then who's under the house?" another asked.

A third voice said, "Two will get you ten that Dave the Wave has come back with reinforcements."

"How do you like that creep?" one of them said. "Trying to rub us out!"

All shooting had stopped. Shayne decided he had better get moving before he was caught where he was.

V

THANKS TO THE chunk of slag cement, Mike Shayne's element of surprise was gone as far as a frontal approach was concerned. He was dealing with professionals, and he knew

full weight upon it, on a bit of brittle dried reed.

Is snapped like a rifle shot and immediately the lights in the model homes were switched off. He got his feet under him and, keeping as low as he could, scurried the remaining distance toward the houses. In the final few feet, he stumbled over a chunk of slag cement invisible in the twilight and fell headlong. He used the impetus of his fall to roll him right up against the foot of the wall as a trio of shots cracked above him and the bullets sped into the gathering darkness above him.

G. Patchen immediately opened up in reply with a

perfectly well that he would not be permitted entry through the courtyard or any door or window of the model houses. If he stayed where he was, sooner or later, Visconti and Company would get him.

Calculating that they would expect him to move toward the courtyard and the false cover of the Cadillac—he had noted before dusk set in that the big vehicle would leave him open to enfilading fire from the upstairs windows—he began cautiously picking his way in the opposite direction, toward the northern end of the walled enclave.

Danny Davis had mentioned that there was a jetty, invisible from the landward side of the development. Shayne doubted that his friends would be expecting his arrival from the bay. If he was to regain any element of the unexpected, this seemed his only approach.

He heard footsteps in the courtyard just as he rounded the northwest corner of the enclosing wall—followed by more carefully spaced rifle shots from G. Patchen. There was a sharp cry of pain from one of the men, and Shayne granted his cool collaborator with another notch in efficiency. The girl could shoot as promised.

The sounds inside faded as Shayne, moving with great care,

worked along the north wall of the real estate enclave with the water a few yards ahead of him. The line of the shore ended abruptly, with the wall foundation continued northward another fifty yards or so. Peering around the corner to his right, the redhead could see the small jetty some fifteen yards away and the trim motor launch moored to it, both clearly outlined by lights from the seaward side of the houses.

There was nothing for it but to go into the water.

Shayne debated whether or not to strip at least partially. If the drop of the shoreline proved deep enough to force him to swim, clothing, especially shoes, would be a mobility impediment. On the other hand, if he skinned down to his skivvies, he would have no means of carrying a spare clip for the Remington, except in his teeth.

He tested the water, found it dredged over his depth to the concrete revetment on which he lay. He compromised, removing his jacket and shoes and, leaving them rolled into a small bundle against the base of the wall, slid silently into the water. While, beyond the shadow of the dunes, night had not yet fully fallen, late twilight visibility was sufficiently low to make discovery difficult.

He worked along the wall to the jetty. His intention had been to climb atop it and rush the little group of model homes from the water, employing renewed surprise to get the drop on the trio inside. He counted on the fact his partner had evidently hit one of them to lessen the odds against him.

But he would need cover and the jetty offered none. He considered remaining in the water until he could make his move and extract the person of Madelon Wentworth from her captors, decided his position was too risky. Then he viewed the motor launch moored to the end of the small jetty and changed his plans, which had originally intended to use an escape route via the shore side to G. Patchen and his ^{sub}car.

If he could use the launch, he might manage a getaway by water. He scrambled around to its sheltered side and slid aboard, discovering that it offered not only a means of escape but excellent cover as well. Without actually revving the powerful twin outboard motors, it seemed to be in good running condition.

The redhead had just completed his checkup when there was sudden activity in the group of houses, accompanied by another measured trio of more distant shots from his

partner. A rectangle of sudden light all but blinded the detective as a door was flung open without warning.

Visconti and his two aides appeared in silhouette against it, one of them with his left arm in a sling. They offered the waiting redhead a perfect target save for one thing—in front of them they were propelling a struggling Madelon Wentworth. The hostage was offering such violent physical protest that Shayne dared not risk a shot.

To rise and threaten them at gun point would have been to invite at least two return shots with himself offering a much-too-easy target himself and unable to return their fire. All he could think of was to wait, crouched in the launch cockpit, and hope that he could make an effective move when the captive and her captors reached the end of the jetty.

It was at that moment that a powerful marine motor roared into life behind him, somewhere in the growing darkness of the bay. The sound was so unexpected that all of them were briefly paralyzed. As the roar grew louder with the rapid approach of the invisible craft, the redhead wondered who had notified the marine patrol of Chief Will Gentry's police. With so much shooting, anyone might have overheard and put

in a call, although their isolation had been virtually complete.

His belief that it was the law was reinforced when a now-visible powerboat swung about, mere yards from the craft in which Shayne was crouching, and a sudden searchlight beam caught and held the Visconti group and their captive. One possibility that had not entered the redhead's calculation was that it might be Danny Davis.

But it was the voice of Dave the Wave that rang out in his ear, saying, "All right, you crumbs. You're covered. Let Madelon come aboard."

There was a moment of hesitation, when the whole operation hung in the balance. Then a gun flashed from behind the struggling hostage and the searchlight was abruptly cut off in a tinkle of glass.

Damn fine shooting! Shayne thought as, with his Remington ready, he half rose from his crouch to take a decisive part in the action. Two more shots barked from the Visconti group before he could yell for the hostage to drop flat on the planks of the jetty.

Davis, having made his grand maneuver, was caught in a trap and gave his launch the gun, swerving past Shayne's launch and rocking it violently against the small pier. More shots

crowded as somebody yelled, "He's getting away!"

The aborted rescue launch had swung out less than fifty yards when, following a brief fusilade from the jetty, a flame appeared in the cockpit and its engine coughed to silence. Then, with a tremendous roar and concussion, the boat blew up.

Shayne was just in time to see a black shape hurtle through the air against the glare of the explosion before he ducked again, crowding under the edge of the jetty to dodge the brief rain of debris, much of it aflame, that showered down on all within radius of the blast.

He got into action then, and this time, save for a brief flare-up by Visconti, was able to take charge. The wiry master thief he dealt with by laying the flat of his Remington none too gently against the side of the man's head, crumpling him to the planks. The uninjured remaining member of the trio showed signs of fight which ceased abruptly when, from the open door behind them a familiar voice sounded.

"I wouldn't, if I were you," said G. Patchen, standing almost casually with the Mannlicher at the ready. With that, the last flare of resistance ended abruptly.

While G. Patchen kept the

sullen Visconti group, now disarmed and at least temporarily without thought of resistance, under one of their own gunsights, Shayne, at Madelon's suggestion, found the caretaker-watchman of Ocean Front Village's model houses bound and locked in an upstairs closet of the gaudily furnished main dwelling and office for the aborted real estate operation.

When Shayne returned, the svelte insurance executive was just finishing giving the Visconti group their orders in no uncertain terms.

She was saying, "...and no, I can hardly turn you over to the police with the Blues still missing, though I would not advise any of you to return to New York in the near future. If you do, my company will throw the book at you—even if it means dealing with your bosses, which I assure you we are quite competent to do. And if any of you or your good buddies show your noses in this show again, you'll be hauled into court and charged with full damages for any and all destruction involved in this episode, including charges for the powerboat you shot at and destroyed."

Then, to Sahyne, "We'll take the caretaker to a hospital here and return to Miami Beach."

"How?" said Shayne. "Remember, I have a flat."

"Come on," she said quietly, leading the way to the courtyard.

There were two cars there now, the long Cadillac with its two dead tires and Shayne's. On the latter, no trace of bullet damage remained.

Shayne, who had retrieved his discard clothing and donned it before rescuing the caretaker, was briefly puzzled. Then he said, "Well, you changed that tire."

G. Patchen replied, "While you were working your way around the house. I thought we might need the car."

"Hey!" said Visconti, the left side of his face now livid and swollen from Shayne's pistol-whipping. "How are we going to get out of here? We've only got one spare."

"Ride the rims or try walking," said the insurance executive without a flicker of pity. "Just be thankful you're not facing a murder rap for Danny Davis."

Madelon Wentworth said nothing. She seemed to be emotionally wiped out by what she had just been through, a pliable zombie, silent, obedient. Nor did she utter more than an occasional monosyllable until the three of them—herself, G. Patchen and Shayne—were in G.

Patchen's suite at the Miami Beach hotel.

There, G. Patchen put into operation such salvage and rescue operations as she could summon safely without giving away the nature of the actual causes of the marine disaster. It was simply a motor launch accident with a possible fatality. She frowned when at last she put down the phone and reached for the highball Shayne had mixed at her request. He has also made drinks for Madelon Wentworth and himself.

Putting down her glass, the insurance executive said, "Shayne, what are the chances of recovering the body?"

The redhead could only shrug.

"Not too good," he replied. "Even if the body floats, the current will probably carry it out to sea. If there is blood. . ." He shrugged again.

"Sharks?" she said and, at his nod, "Jesus, you don't suppose he had the Blues on him, do you?"

"He said not, of course," replied the detective. "But Danny could lie like a trouter."

Madelon, her tongue loosened at last, said, "Sure he could lie. He had to, with the world against him."

The other two ignored her. Shayne said, "I'd give a lot to

know where he picked up that powerboat."

"Oh," said G. Patchen, "I'm sorry. I picked that up over the phone just now. He borrowed or stole it from a sportsman friend with a private marina south of Leisure City. Mercifully, it was not insured by O. & W."

Madelon Wentworth exploded, "How can you sit there so cold and heartless and talk about Danny that way? You don't even know for sure he's dead."

"Better face it, Mrs. Wentworth," said G. Patchen. "It's ten to one he was killed when the boat blew up. Even if he survived, the chances of his surviving for long are even slimmer."

Shayne said, "You lost a husband, too, in this, Mrs. Wentworth."

"I know." Released by the drink, tears of contrition rolled down her slightly pudgy cheeks. "Phil did his best to provide for me, but he wasn't much of a man."

"And Davis was?" G. Patchen suggested.

The tear-softened eyes glowed with romantic memory.

"Danny was such a gentleman," she breathed.

Shayne digested that remark with some difficulty. He found it hard to consider Dave the

Wave as anything but a self-centered unscrupulous despoiler of women, to say nothing of a born opportunist with little save larceny in his heart.

Madelon Wentworth seemed to read his thoughts. She said, "Dave was a lover, a great lover. I don't mean just the sex bit, either, though he was tremendous that way, too. But he really gave himself to a girl in a way few men do nowadays. Remember, he died trying to get me out of the clutches of those horrible men."

Shayne forbore remarking that it was Dave the Wave's maneuvering that had put her into the clutches of those same horrible men and that it was more probably desire to rob the original thieves of their hostage as a bargaining point than romantic love for the victim that had led to his own desperate attempt at rescue. The redhead also forbore mentioning that Dave's conning the Wentworths into larceny had led directly to Phil Wentworth's murder in the Morro Castle Motel.

He murmured to G. Patchen, "I wonder where in hell he did stash the Blues."

"That," replied the svelte insurance executive, sotto voce, "makes two of us, plus the entire board of O. & W. as well



as Everard Barton and, presumably, his wife."

Ignoring this byplay, Madelon Wentworth continued a seemingly endless eulogy of the gentlemanly behavior of Dave the Wave. She touched on his taste in clothes (a taste Shayne had always found lamentable), on his savoir faire in ordering from a restaurant menu (Shayne had heard Davis once try to order from a french

printed restaurant *carte de jour* with ludicrous results), on his fastidiousness where alcoholic drinks were concerned.

"...always, no matter what else, Danny insisted on filling his glass with ice before pouring any spirits into it," she said and went on to emphasize Davis's insistence on taking only well refrigerated drinks.

A light-bulb seemed to flash in the redhead's mind, rather like the familiar symbol for inspiration so beloved of comic-strip cartoonists. As the widow Wentworth rambled on about her boy friend, his eyes narrowed and he tugged at the lobe of his left ear. Inescapably, a vision out of recent memory had formed in his mind's eye.

It was a vision of Danny Davis, stretched out on the sofa of Shayne's East Second Avenue hotel apartment, drinking the redhead's finest Napoleon gift-brandy and drinking it warm and with ginger ale. At the moment, the impression left on the detective by Davis's behavior had been one of incredible bad taste. Now, however, it was something else.

He sprang to his feet and said to G. Patchen, "Come on, I may have an idea."

Leaving Madelon Wentworth behind them in the hotel, they sped westward over the causeway from the Beach to Miami

proper. Only once during the swift drive through the night traffic did the insurance executive ask him what he had in mind.

"You'll see for yourself soon enough," he replied. "It's a long shot and I'm probably making a fool of myself."

From the basement parking garage, they rode directly upward to the redhead's apartment in the hotel elevator and Shayne led the way inside to stop dead just within the threshold. A faint light radiated from beyond the living room, from the kitchen area.

G. Patchen, alert as ever, noticed it too. Lifting an elegant eyebrow, she whispered, "Did you leave a light on, Shayne?"

"In the kitchen? Hell no—not in broad daylight," he said softly, drawing the Remington from its holster over his left pectoral muscles. "Stay back."

He might as well have tried to stop a racing truck. G. Patchen was right on his heels as he moved swiftly and silently toward the kitchen area. The door was shut, the light leading faintly from between its edges and jambs and sill. Lifting a finger to caution his companion to continued silence, Shayne flung the door open.

Both of them stopped dead on the threshold at the

unexpected sight they found within. Dave the Wave, clad in a long raincoat, leaned against the drainboard, peering into a sink basin that appeared to be brim-filled with steaming hot water.

Some small sound they made must have warned him of their presence. He looked around at them, oddly baby-ish of face with his eyebrows gone, and said amiably, "Hi there. This ice of yours takes the devil's own time melting." Then, as they approached, "Say, Mike, did you just happen by now? I mean, is this just more of my back luck or did you figure it out?"

"He figured it out," said G. Patchen in unexpected tribute. Pushing Davis aside, she pulled from the basin a tray-shaped block of already thinning ice. Milk had been poured into it originally, so that it was opaque, but here and there a crystal had broken the thawing surface, a crystal that flashed blue under the kitchen light.

Looking at Davis almost gratefully, she said, "Thank God you didn't try to smash the ice. Frozen diamonds are as brittle as glass."

"All right, Danny," said Shayne, "how in hell did you survive the explosion?"

He said, "Oh! Actually, I was going over the side when

that bastard hit us. It gave me quite a jolt, but I was going away from it and the blast merely sent me further on my way. I was coming back under water to get Madelon out of there and clear the deal."

"Under-water?" G. Patchen asked, incredulous.

"Why not?" countered Davis. He unfastened his raincoat and stood revealed in a black rubber scuba suit minus the compressed air tank. He picked up a glass face cover from the drainboard and added, "I didn't get this pulled in place in time. Alas, poor eyebrows! But by the time I got ashore, you had the whole thing wrapped up."

"So you came up here," said Shayne.

"So I came up here. I figured I'd better get back to the Blues before somebody else got them."

G. Patchen said, "I presume you were planning on turning them in as soon as you got the ice melted."

Danny Davis looked as if she had suggested he strike his undoubtedly sainted mother or had just kicked his dog. He said, "I'm sure Mike would never ask such a question—would you, Mike?"

Shayne did not dignify the leading question with a reply. G. Patchen shouldered Davis

aside and retrieved another of Shayne's ice tray fillers. More of the magnificent Barton Blues glittered out of the milky surface of the melting ice.

He said, "Why the milk bit, Danny—to hide the stones?"

"Right," said Davis. "If you don't look too close, it merely looks like the ice has bubbled as it froze."

"Not a bad gimmick," the redhead admitted.

"Say, Mike, what *did* put you onto it?" Davis asked.

Shayne told him about Madelon's revelation of his drinking habits. Dave the Wave sighed and said, "When she starts talking, that broad doesn't know how to stop."

"What were you planning to do with them, Danny?" the redhead asked.

Davis shrugged, said, "No matter since I'm not going to get the chance. But a certain rich buddy of mine really digs blue diamonds. I thought—well, like I said, he's a good buddy, too."

"Does he—I mean, *did* he—have a powerboat some-

where south of the city?" Shayne asked.

"That," Davis grinned crookedly "would be telling."

Later, when G. Patchen and Mike Shayne were alone, she said, "By the time we make deductions for the boat and other damages, our friend's reward money is going to take quite a shrinking." She paused, added, "The poor bastard."

"My God!" said Shayne in disbelief. "I think you're actually sorry for Danny."

There were both amusement and an unfamiliar tenderness in G. Patchen's green eyes as she stared at the redhead. She said, "Heaven help me, I believe you're right."

Shayne had been about to ask her for a date, also to ask her what her first initial stood for. Now he had a hunch that he was never going to know.

Women! he thought like at least a billion men before him. The stronger they were, the weaker the men they fell for.

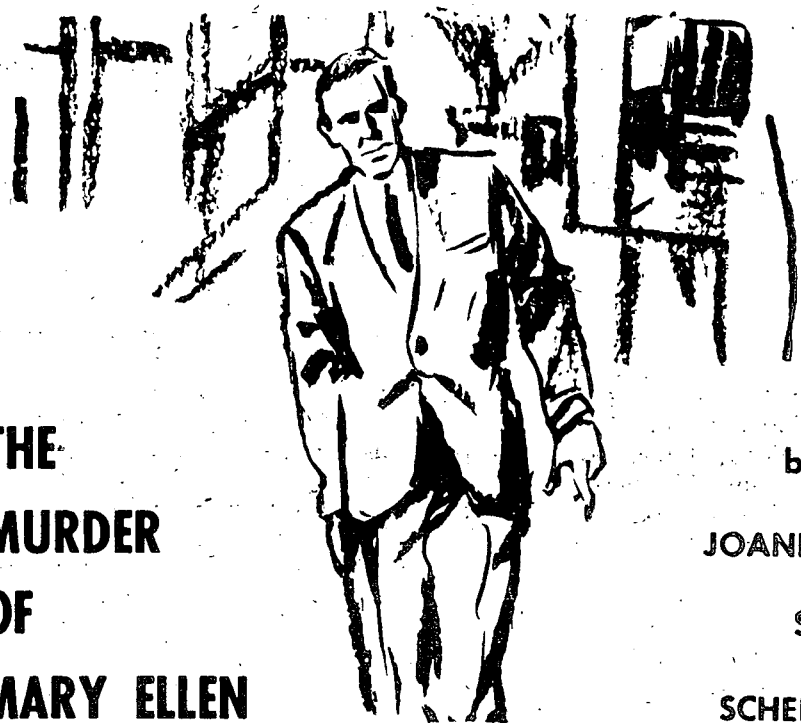
Mike Shayne began a solitary drive back from the beach under the stars.



THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month

THE MURDER OF MARY ELLEN

by
JOANN
S.
SCHEB



She was too mean to live, too young to die—and she was all mine! There was one way out for me. If I could only...

DR. GEORGE JENSEN leaned back in the chair, crossed his long legs and came to the conclusion that he should murder his wife, Mary Ellen.

Mary Ellen was a tall, skinny, complaining kind of woman with tendencies toward hypo-

chondria and martyrdom. At the moment, she was sitting across the room from him, propped high in a hospital bed, all combed and cologned and looking forward to a bit of minor surgery in the morning. "You will stay with me to-

morrow, won't you, George?" she was saying. "You won't let me go through this all alone?"

George ran a finger around under his white collar. More and more often, lately, he'd had the feeling that he was being choked to death. From time to time, he'd entertained thoughts of leaving her, but Mary Ellen was not favorably inclined toward divorce. Rather, she clung to him like a spider web might cling to an eyelash, and she was equally as annoying.

"Nothing will go wrong," he said. "It's a very minor operation. Millions of women have had it, and Pete Miller is a very fine gynecologist."

"But surgery is surgery," Mary Ellen reminded him, "and my heart has been palpitating lately. After all, George, if it hadn't been for me—"

George Jensen hadn't kept a complete count, but he figured that Mary Ellen had referred to the fact that it had been her money on which he had completed medical school at least 942 times in the six years they had been married.

And that was another thing. Divorce from Mary Ellen would not only be practically impossible; it would be financially disastrous. George's alimony payments would rival the interest on the national debt.

"Mary Ellen," he said pa-

tiently. "If you don't want to go through with this, Pete Miller said you really didn't have to."

"I might as well," she whined, her voice dripping with self-pity. "There's no point in delaying the inevitable. But if I should die—"

"You're not going to die," he said. He added to himself—it *would certainly be good for me*, and it was at that moment that he knew that he really should kill her.

"But if I do," Mary Ellen said.

"But you won't," he said.

It was only a little later that he met Carolyn in the corridor and decided that he *would*.

Carolyn Richards was small, blue-eyed, blond-haired, soft and feminine and yet fiercely independent. He'd been in love with her for months.

"I'll be a little late tonight," he said as he stopped beside her and pretended to check the chart on his clip-board. "I'll have to stay with Mary Ellen until visiting hours are over."

Carolyn's pretty lips hardly moved, but her words were very clear.

"No," she said, her little white cap bouncing independently on top of her pretty blond head. "Don't come. I don't want to see you, George."

"You what?"

"I don't want to see you," she repeated. "This whole thing is wrong, you know. We never should have started something we couldn't finish."

"We didn't start it. It just happened."

"We shouldn't have let it happen."

He took her elbow and led her into a nearby doctor-nurses' lounge. Luckily, no one else was in there.

"Look, Carolyn," he said. "I love you. You know that, don't you?"

Long lashes slid down to hide her lovely eyes.

"I don't want to hurt you," she said.

"Then why are you? What's happened?"

"I met Mary Ellen today. She needs you, George. She's like a helpless little child."

"But what about *us*? Don't you know that I need you?"

"I'm sorry, George. I—I guess I just wasn't cut out to be a home-breaker. You'll be all right, and so will I. But Mary Ellen—Mary Ellen would simply die!"

And as she turned and ran from the room, George Jensen stood with his mouth hanging open. Indeed she would, he thought. Indeed, Mary Ellen would die. There was no doubt in his mind about it now.

It had been a long and pain-



ful day, and George Jensen was exhausted by the time he left Mary Ellen's room that night and walked slowly down the hospital corridor. He was a reasonably tall man, but with his shoulders slumped and his arms hanging loose, he looked and felt small and helpless. He knew that he should murder Mary Ellen, and he was determined that he would, but he did not yet know how he could get away with it.

And then, through a door marked "Private," came his answer.

The hospital administrator's name was Alvin Cramer. He was big, jovial and somewhat loud, more like a used car salesman than a hospital executive, but he was a hard worker, and Jensen had to respect him even if he didn't particularly like him.

"Hi, there, George," Cramer

said, slapping the younger man on the shoulder and falling into step beside him. "Did you know that your wife is going to be the first patient to use the new operating room?"

"No," Jensen said. "I didn't."

"Yep. Plumber just got finished. That's why I'm here so late. Had him work overtime tonight to get the anesthetic apparatus hooked up, so we could use the new room in the morning. Had three emergencies today. Place is so crowded we had to get the new wing ready for tomorrow or reschedule everything and stop all accidents from happening."

"Good," Jensen said, letting the germ of an idea creep to the edge of his mind. "That's fine. Think I'll go take a look."

"Good idea. Want me to come along?"

"No need. I'm just curious." And then, as if it were an afterthought, he added, "Oh, if you see Pete Miller in the morning, tell him not to wait for me. I'll be along as soon as I can."

"I'll make it a point to see him," Alvin Cramer said, as Jensen had known he would.

The new surgical wing was bright, shiny and extremely efficient-looking. George Jensen walked through it slowly, turning on lights as he went. His

heels made soft, thumping noises on the highly polished floor and echoed in the emptiness as he moved to the operating table. Everything was in readiness. In the morning, Mary Ellen would be there, lying on that table, already half unconscious.

The hoses through which the anesthetic was administered came down through the ceiling. There were two of them. One would carry oxygen; the other cyclopropane, which is poisonous. An overdose of cyclopropane paralyzes the respiratory center in the brain, so that the patient stops breathing.

It is the anesthetist's job to keep the oxygen and the cyclopropane in perfect balance, so that the patient is rendered unconscious, yet not dangerously so.

Once, when Jensen was in intern, he had seen a patient receive too much cyclopropane. His lips had turned a dull and sickening blue, and his breathing had slowed and almost stopped. He'd looked as if he'd been having a heart attack, but as soon as the anesthetist had turned down the cyclopropane and increased the oxygen, the color had returned and the breathing had become normal again.

It was not difficult to switch the hoses. Jensen was intelligent

and quick with his hands, and the job was done in less than fifteen minutes.

Outside, rain was coming down in torrents as Jensen backed his car around and shot out of the hospital parking lot.

Everything was set.

In the morning, they would roll Mary Ellen into the operating room and lay her on the table, and Paul Andrews would begin to anesthetize her. Because he was a cautious man, he would begin with a larger proportion of oxygen and a lesser proportion of cyclopropane. But the proportion would be reversed, and Mary Ellen would be getting a sizeable amount of cyclopropane from the moment the mask was clamped down over her face.

Mary Ellen would begin to turn blue, her breathing pattern would change. She'd appear to be having a heart attack.

Andrews would notice immediately, would cut down on the cyclopropane and increase the oxygen supply, but Mary Ellen of course, would continue to get worse. With the hoses reversed, Andrews would be increasing the cyclopropane and decreasing the oxygen, and in a matter of seconds—a minute or two at the most—it would be over.

The plumber couldn't be blamed. After all, it wasn't like

getting the hot water hooked up to the cold water tap. This was a job he did far less frequently, and even if the results were more tragic, they were certainly more understandable.

Jensen took a deep breath and smiled, wondering whether he should sue the hospital when it was all over. And then his smile turned into a scream. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a big truck bearing down on him, and he realized that he'd forgotten to stop at the highway.

The pain was unbelievably excruciating. There was a tight band of steel around his middle, cutting into his flesh and ribs.

He couldn't move. He felt himself being lifted, and later, he knew that he was in the hospital by the antiseptic smell, the rustle of starched clothes, the soft padding of rubber-soled feet, but he was having difficulty forcing his eyes to open.

He heard someone say his name, and then he caught fragments of whispered sentences, like "surgery" and "new wing". He must have floated in and out of consciousness several times because when he finally opened his eyes, Paul Andrews was bending over him, fitting the anesthetic mask firmly down over his face, and he was beginning to have difficulty breathing.

From Tinker to Evers to Jail

Sleek and smart and all female she was—and deadly as a cobra. Could we unmask her in time—in time to stay alive?

by JERRY JACOBSON

IN THE Men's Accessories Department of Heilman's Department Store, clerk Harold Babcock waited with polite patience while a male customer decided between a pair of onyx cuff links and a pair of pretentious looking silver ones for French cuffs. The customer's vacillation seemed to be nearing an end. His fingers were lingering a little caressingly on the silver ones for French cuffs.

"Excuse me, sir, but if I may make a suggestion, I wouldn't select the silver links unless my wardrobe contained a number of shirts with French cuffs to accomodate their use adequately."

The customer's eyes screwed themselves into question marks. "No?"

Affectedly, Harold Babcock touched the knot of his wide mod necktie. Two weeks on the job and he was getting the hang of this slightly narcissistic, slightly I-am-more-fashionable-and-more-chic-than-thou world.

"Oh my, no," Babcock said, nearly enjoying the mimicry of it all. "Not the silver links, definitely. Nor the onyx, either. Unless you are prepared to make quite a substantial investment in shirts, sir."

The customer's face showed mild annoyance.

"I have two French cuff dress shirts," he told Babcock.

"Two," said Babcock. He held the word in the tips of his fingers, at arm's length. "Just two. Pardon me for mentioning it sir, but two French cuff shirts



hardly do justice to cuff links of this rare workmanship and quality. If you are considering increasing your shirt wardrobe, I suggest you make those selections first. And then we will be

in a better position to coordinate."

"To—coordinate?"

"To coordinate, sir. Without coordination, one's dress excludes only chaos."

"Chaos," the customer repeated.

"Sheer and utter chaos, sir. Trust me."

Slightly injured, the customer nodded to Babcock mutely and then moved off slowly, as though injured, to the department selling dress shirts, sports shirts, and neckties. It was located across the first floor aisle, fairly hugging the first floor escalators.

In this section catering to the glorification of the male plumage, Cal Evers noted Babcock's shuttling of the customer to his area and immediately moved up to greet him, a broad Heilman smile on his face.

"Sir? Have you been assisted yet?"

Wordlessly the customer just exiled from Men's Accessories by Babcock gestured behind him.

"I was just over at—"

"Could it be a sport coat sir?" said Evers, he too getting a fine feel for this racket. "You're of Nordic origin, aren't you sir? I can tell. If I may be so bold, sir, one of Nordic background should try always to stay with the darker hues when selecting suits and sport-coats. The fairness of the skin, you know."

"I happen to be Irish."

"But a fair skinned Irishman, nonetheless," said Evers, re-

covering beautifully. "Will it be a sport coat or suit, sir?"

"Shirts," said the customer. "With French cuffs."

Evers scowled as though the man had just let his necktie fall into his vichyssoise.

"These days, sir, you'll find wide favor with them only in France and their colonies. And unless you plan to spend a great deal of time *sur la continent*—on the continent, sir—I should shy from French cuffs completely, sir. Now, if it's long-collar modish dress shirts you are after sir, we have a fine assortment of styles, colors, and fabrics."

Five minutes and one neck measurement later, Evers sent the man off with an assortment of short-sleeve dress shirts and then moved across the gulf of aisle where Babcock was bent to a glass counter display of tie-backs and billfolds.

"Sold the man three dress shirts, Babcock. Stunning selections, if I do say so myself."

Babcock rose serenely. "The gentleman wanted French cuff links," he told Evers stiffly. "If you can imagine a thing like that. I mean, there are some places which should be sacrosanct to a man with some tastes in clothing. If you can catch my meaning."

Evers nodded with tremendous propriety, his hands

folded across his front and sneaked a look at his watch. "Nearly four o'clock and so far, they haven't showed," he said out of the side of his mouth. "We go off at five and then Morse and Gallworthy get a four-hour crack at them. Rookies. They should have such luck."

"I feel it coming this afternoon," Babcock said. "Tuesdays and Thursdays. And this is Tuesday. And the only chain or department store in the downtown area where they haven't done any shopping."

"No chance," said Evers. "We've been wowing the men's fashion world for two weeks now and all we've got to show for it is a fat zero."

"They're casing, Evers," Babcock said. "You can bet they've made a few walk-throughs just to see who's hanging around the escalators, who's lurking trying to fake being a floorwalker or supervisor. They'll show this afternoon. I got that feeling."

"I got twenty bucks says we don't do anything the rest of this shift but sell a few bobbles, close our tills and grab a sandwich."

Babcock grinned. "Give me 2-1 on that twenty?"

"You got it, Babcock."

Evers nodded and went back to shirts and neckties. Babcock

took a casual look around the area and then dipped back to his wallet and tie-tack displays.

At ten minutes of five o'clock, Babcock's heart did a small jump at the sight of the smartly dressed man and woman who entered Heilman's south main door. The man was forty, and walked with assurance in a trim tan suit. The woman clinging to his arm wore a tan trouser suit beneath a white cardigan jacket her face shining out from beneath a broad brimmed hat and wide, oval sunglasses.

Just inside the door, the woman pulled to a halt to browse in the jewelry department and the man obliged, with a look of tolerance on his expressionless face.

When Babcock was sure they were totally preoccupied, he slipped quickly across the aisle, where Evers was arranging neckties on a countertop.

"South entrance," he said to Evers. "They just came in. Tinkers is the guy in the tan suit; his wife's wearing the big hat and sunglasses. They're in jewelry, waiting for a mark."

"I see them. Looks like we go."

"We go."

Babcock returned to Mens' Accessories and found a matronly woman peering into monogrammed handkerchiefs.

The Tinkers were still browsing the jewelry, so Babcock waited on her.

"May I help you, Ma'm?"

The deep blue eyes showed Babcock a look of deep concern. "Young man, I have been examining your selection of monogrammed handkerchiefs," said the surprisingly sharp, concise voice, "and to my disappointment, I find you have no handkerchiefs of the nature I require."

"Which kind do you require, Madam?"

The old woman took in an enormous breath and touched an equally enormous brooch of jade dangling from her well-wrinkled neck. "I require, young man, thin gold block lettering—not script, mind you—in the alphabetical configuration of Q-Q-Q."

"Ma'm?"

"For my husband, young man. Specifically, the retired and honorable Quincy Queets Quillian, former corporation lawyer for the firm of Bannerman, Rickover and Hayes, of this city."

Babcock glanced up to keep a check on the movements of the Tinkers. He knew the kind of mark they sought: a well-dressed woman exuding above-average elegance—perhaps a fur across her shoulders, or a Pucci original wrapping her frame—

and one carrying a handbag or shoulder purse of the type the Tinkers preferred. Such a woman, however, had not yet entered the store to pass them in the jewelry department and the Tinkers continued to appear contemplative of the glittering displays.

"Q-Q-Q, young man!" said the woman again. "Silk, and in thin, gold block lettering. I have left conservatively a half-dozen stores today unsatisfied. Unsatisfied, young man. An honored former lawyer and devoted husband of this city and community, because his forebears chose to name him according to one of the least-used letters of the alphabet, will not have a gift of need, tradition and beauty to commemorate his seventieth birthday."

Babcock snapped his head up. The Tinkers were moving, following closely behind a woman in a white fox fur who appeared to be making her single-minded to the escalators behind the departments of jewelry and perfumes and adjacent to the sections in which Babcock and Evers were working.

"Young man!" said the woman in search of handkerchiefs to honor her retired lawyer husband on his seventieth birthday. "Q-Q-Q, young man! Please!"

Babcock caught Evers attention with a quick whistle, though it wasn't needed. He too, saw the Tinkers fall in behind their intended mark and was moving to an exit in his department.

"Ma'm?"

"Young man!"

"If you will wait just a minute, Mrs. Quillian," Babcock said quickly. "I think I have solved your dilemma. How many handkerchiefs do you require with the Q-Q-Q monogram?"

"Twelve, young man. One full dozen. In thin, gold block letters."

"If you will excuse me just a moment, Mrs. Quillian," said Babcock. He smiled quickly, hoping he had not given offense to this lovely little woman who sought only twelve simple pieces of silk with which to honor her husband's seventieth year.

"I shall wait, young man. Hopefully and with dignity, I shall wait."

The smartly dressed woman had nearly reached the gulf of aisleway between the departments occupied by Babcock and Evers, followed a few paces back by the Tinkers.

Mrs. Tinker increased her pace until she had moved past her husband, who slowed his own step to accomodate the

order of things. Both Babcock and Evers poised casually at the exits of their respective departments and allowed the elegantly dressed mark to pass on her hurried way to the *Up-escalator*. Babcock touched his necktie knot and pretended to be concerned with a revolving rack of keytainers. Beyond him, Evers peered into his sales receipt booklet, as though something astounded or puzzled him, which Babcock considered very likely.

This was it, then. There first genuine crack at the Tinkers in this city in over a year. Babcock tried to look occupied, Evers tried to look contemplatively mathematical over his figures. The mark passed. And an elderly, altogether enchanting woman's voice yelled out.

"Young man? Two Qs would be acceptable! Although I don't know how Quincy will take to that!"

There was no time for Babcock to acknowledge the woman's compromise, because the Tinkers were moving swiftly into the gulf between the two departments of surveillance. Babcock kept his eyes surreptitiously peeled on Mr. and Mrs. Tinker as they moved quickly to close ground on the mark. There was a quick nod from Evers, returned quickly by Babcock.

Mrs. Tinker passed by and Evers stepped from behind his counter just as Babcock made an oblique rush on Mr. Tinker, clamping one hand over his mouth and using the other to subdue Tinker in an arm-lock and rush him off in an opposite direction.

Meanwhile, the woman in the white fox fur stepped gingerly onto the escalator, followed by Mrs. Tinker two steps behind, followed by Evers. They rose soundlessly into the air. Evers shuffled a half-step to his right and the view from there was conspicuously portentous. Dangling loosely from the right arm of the woman in the fox fur, the simple snap-clasp on the soft leather purse begged to be opened by light fingers. And just in front and slightly above Evers, the fingers of the right hand of Mrs. Charlotte Tinkers began to flutter in preparatory exercise like five fluttering white birds whose little beaks were tinged red. And still they rose. Higher and higher. Thirty feet to go. The *modus operandi* of the Tinkers never varied, the simple Pass and Split always an act of pure timing. Twenty feet, ten feet, . . .

And then Evers saw a feminine hand snake out to deftly lift the purse clasp. Items flashed their colors as Charlotte Tinker passed them behind her neck.

An alligator checkbook, a billfold, a fat container of credit cards, a hefty unsealed envelope with a frosted window in it showing through the haze the greened picture of a former United States' president.

The escalator crested on the second floor and the woman in the fox fur moved away in jaunty ignorance. Here was where the Tinkers were to coolly separate, but Charlotte Tinker wasn't going away. Evers grabbed her right wrist and in an instant had a silvery circle of handcuff around it. He shouted the woman in the white fox fur to a halt.

Charlotte Tinker was not a wholly unprepared thief. She turned on Evers with indignance firing in her wily eyes.

"What is this? Help! Someone help me, please! Masher! Rapist! He's holding my children for ransom! Someone call a policeman!"

Evers identified himself to the woman in the white fox fur and then offered a checkbook, billfold, credit card container and bank envelope for identification.

"Going down, Mrs. Tinker. Game ending triple-play. From Tinkers to Evers to Jail."

Back on the first floor a crowd had gathered around Lt. Babcock and the subdued Mr. Tinkers near Mens' Accessories.

A young boy requested that Babcock fire his pistol and an elderly woman shouted obscenely at the cowering Tinkers.

"Where's the back unit downtown unit?" Evers asked.

"Just outside the south entrance, waiting like a coach after the ball."

Evers explained to the woman in the white fox fur that she would have to accompany them downtown as a material witness. After her possessions were photographed and entered as evidence she could reclaim them.

"Rape!" screamed Charlotte Tinkers, her mousy hair flying in an electric rage. "No one move! I've planted a bomb in this building and if anything happens to..."

"Let's go, Charlotte," said Evers. "A lot of fine people downtown have been awaiting your arrival for some months and we wouldn't like to keep them any longer than we have to. Taxpayers money costs money."

Babcock took a firmer grip on Julius Tinkers forearm. He felt a tug at his coat sleeve. When he turned a pair of familiar, old twinkling eyes beseeched that she not be forgotten.

"Young man. Twelve monogrammed handkerchiefs. Thin gold lettering—not script mind

you—in the alphabetical configuration of Q-Q-Q."

Babcock found a clerk and brought him to the small woman who had not been awfully disturbed or even aware of the scene going on around her. "This is Mrs. Quinlin Queets Quillian, wife of retired and honorable Quinlin Quillian, former corporation lawyer for the law firm of Bannerman, Rickover and Haynes..."

"Hayes," said the woman.

"Yes. She requires one dozen monogrammed handkerchiefs to honor her husband's seventieth birthday, thin gold lettering—not script, mind you—in the alphabetical configuration of Q-Q-Q. In the O-O-O Drawer in Mens' Accessories, you will find a boxed dozen of the type and quality she requires. You will take them to Alterations and have one of the girls sew on twelve little gold tails."

"Bless you, young man."

"Let's go Evers," Babcock said, smiling to Mrs. Quillian.

"...and there are two auxiliary bombs as well," screamed Charlotte Tinker. "One of which is located in a waste basket in Installment Payments, and the other of which is..."

"Let's go, Mrs. Tinkers," Babcock said. "We can make it out of the building before they go off."



The man who started it all—the man who practically invented the ubiquitous private eye—had his instantaneous imitators—fortunately for us, or, all of those extraordinary sleuths and their remarkable stories might have remained still-born. Success bred rivals, and Sherlock Holmes' contemporaries will pass through these pages, ably selected and scholarly introduced by SAM MOSKOWITZ. Famed friends will ride hansom cabs once again.

SAM MOSKOWITZ

Introduces

THE ADVENTURES OF MR. ALFRED JUGGINS

THE VANISHING DIAMONDS

by M. McDONNELL BODKIN, Q. C.

THE STORY OF the story behind the astonishing exploits of Mr. Alfred Juggins is quite remarkable. It might just as well be told now. The title of the story—*The Vanishing Diamonds, or, The Second Mr. Juggins* (to give its full title) and the name of the author sound awfully much like a spoof. But such is very decidedly not the case. Not only are both the series and the author for real, but the history of its publication represents a fascinating mystery in itself.

No less an authority than the two erudite gentlemen who comprise the revered byline of Ellery Queen list a volume by M. McDonnell Bodkin, Q.C., among the 106 most important books in the history of the detective novel; see *Queen's Quorum*. The

Originally published Week Ending Jan. 23, 1897 in
PEARSON'S WEEKLY (London)



book's title is *Paul Beck, The Rule of Thumb Detective*. It was published by C. Arthur Pearson, London, 1898, the year of the Spanish American War.

A few years later, in 1900, Chatto & Windus, London, published another book by Bodkin—Dora Myrl, *The Lady Detective*. Suddenly, nine years later the two characters achieve a dual appearance in *The Capture of Paul Beck* published by T. Fisher Unwin; and marry at the end. Quite naturally they have a child which not so strangely results in a further book from T.

Fisher Unwin. In 1911, titled *Young Beck*, Paul Junior, becomes a detective in his own right.

So far, so good, but somehow, in the preoccupation with romance and the family, everyone seems to have completely overlooked—or not—the most unusual and mysterious aspect of this Beckian saga.

Simply stated, the cases that appear in *Paul Beck, Rule of Thumb Detective*, are astonishingly enough WORD-FOR-WORD the same as those of *The Adventures of Mr. Alfred Juggins*, except when it comes to the name and description of the detective. Mr. Juggins is "A stout, clumsily-built man in shining black cloth, suggesting rather the notion of a respectable retired milkman than a detective. His face was ruddy, and fringed with reddish brown whiskers, and crowned with a faded auburn wig. There was a chronic look of mild surprise in his wide-open blue eyes, and his heavy underlip pulled his mouth slightly open in repose."

This is interesting, because Paul Beck appears to have been a reincarnation of Mr. Alfred Juggins. Beck is a young man, sturdily built, with brown hair and very intelligent alert features. Since the stories are identical it is obvious they are not the same man. But who is who? Mr. Beck is identical with Mr. Juggins, who thus, so to speak, was the prototype of the Beck apotheosis in the Ellery Queen list of 106 mystery story immortals.

Further, since *The Adventures of Mr. Alfred Juggins* ran as a series beginning in the January 23, 1897 issue of PEARSON'S WEEKLY and ended with the twelfth story *The Slump in Silver* in the April, 17, 1897 issue, and since Mr. Juggins runs true to type throughout the twelve stories, there should be no question he was the original.

There have been cases of authors changing the names of their detectives before. B. Fletcher Robinson, who was famed for his Addington Peace stories, changed the name of that detective to Inspector Hartley (who became even more famous) when he was serialized in an American magazine. However, the change was name only, the character remained fundamentally the same. In Juggins-Beck the characteristics and age of the detectives are considerably altered.

Naturally, readers will conclude, that after the success of the *Dora Myrl, Lady Detective* stories which also were run as a series in PEARSON'S WEEKLY beginning with the issue of May 27, 1899, Bodkin conceived the idea of marrying them off in a later

book and therefore deliberately altered the description and name of Alfred Juggins to a more attractive Paul Beck, so that the two could reasonably consummate that relationship. But that theory doesn't seem to hold water, for the change came *before* the Dora Myrl series was written.

An even more puzzling angle of the case is that PEARSON'S WEEKLY had the largest circulation in England, selling close to half a million copies. A lot of people must have spotted Juggins into Beck, since the change came only a year apart.

The real answer probably rests in the yarn published here. It is titled *The Vanishing Diamonds, or, The Second Mr. Juggins*. In this story, an individual masquerades as Detective Juggins and completely takes in the couple who have had the jewelry stolen from them. The "real" Mr. Juggins arrives on the scene and "solves" the case. When the story ends, Detective Juggins is asked which one he is, the first or the second. They are told the first Mr. Juggins, the imposter, is in jail, trapped by the second Mr. Juggins, and everyone seems satisfied.

Apparently, though, it was the *real* Mr. Juggins who went to jail and the imposter who carried on his work, for the original Juggins was fat, middle-aged and bald and Paul Beck is trim, young and with a full head of brown hair.

It is well to remember that at the time the Alfred Juggins stories appeared in PEARSON'S WEEKLY there flourished during the same wonderful era the so-called "Penny Dreadfuls"—which ran on until well after World War Two. And much to the delight of lowbrow readers and the horror of the highbrows; and whose list of authors comprises virtually an early *Who's Who* of British mystery writers, ranging from Marjorie Allingham (Mr. Campion) to Leslie Charteris (The Saint).

If the villainies dealt with by Mr. Juggins, as expressed in *The Vanishing Diamonds*, seem mild, indeed, compared to those revealed daily by present-day newspapers and television reportage, it might be well to remember that despite its occasional Jack the Ripper and Dr. Crippens, the Gaslight Era was in most respects a far more civilized time than our own, three quarters of a century later. Even so, however, a haul of twenty thousand pounds in jewels is not to be sneezed at even by today's inflated values.

Should the Q.C. following the author's name prove puzzling, it stands for Queen's Counsel, which is what happens to K.C. (for King's Counsel) when a lady sits on the throne.

THE VANISHING DIAMONDS

by M. McDONNELL BODKIN, Q. C.

SHE WAS AS bright as a butterfly in a flower garden, and as restless, quivering down to her finger tips with impatient excitement. There were just a few square yards of clear space where she sat alone—on a couch made for two—patting the soft carpet with a restless little foot. The rest of the room was filled with long tables, and oval tables, and round tables, all crowded with the pretty trifles and trinkets that ladies love. It seemed as if half-a-dozen of the smartest jewellers and fancy shops of Regent Street had emptied their show windows into the room.

For Lilian Ray was to marry Sydney Harcourt in a week, and there was not a more popular couple in London. Her sweet face and winning ways had taken the heart of society by storm; and all the world knew that warm-hearted, hot-headed Harcourt was going hop, step, and jump to the devil when she caught and held him. So everybody was pleased.

No wonder Lilian Ray was excited, for her fiance was coming, and with him were coming the famous Harcourt diamonds, which had been the delight and admiration and envy of fashionable London for half a century. The jewels had gone from the bank, where they had lain in darkness and safety for a dozen years, to the glittering shop of Mr. Ophir, of Bond Street. For the setting was very old, and the vigilance of the tiny silver points that guarded the priceless morsels of bright stone had to be looked to, and a brand new case was ordered to set the precious sparklers off to the best advantage.

At this moment a hansom cab came sharply round the corner in full view of the window. She caught one glimpse of an eager, young face and a flat parcel. There came a knock, and a foot on the stairs mounting four steps at a spring. Another moment and Harcourt was in the room.

"You are ten minutes before your time, sir," Lilian said, "and I am terribly busy. What have you got there?"

"Oh! You know you have been longing impatiently for me and the diamonds, especially the diamonds, for the last hour."

He dropped into the seat beside her and his right arm stole round her waist, while he held the jewel-case away in his left hand. She blushed and laughed, and slipping from his encircling arm, made a dash for the diamonds. But he was too quick for her. Her face was close to his and quite undefended. What happened was, under the circumstances, inevitable.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in quite a natural tone of surprise, "how dare you, sir!"

"Payment in advance," he retorted, as the precious case came down to her desiring hands; "over payment, I confess, but then I am ready to give change to any amount."

The jewel-case was done up in white-brown paper with strong cord and sealed with broad patches of red sealing-wax. Quite excitedly Lilian cut through the string, leaving the seals unbroken, and let paper and twine and wax go down in a heap on the carpet together.

There emerged from the

inner wrapping of soft, white tissue-paper the jewel-case in its new coat of light brown morocco with the monogram L.H. in neat gold letters on it. She gave a little cry of pleasure as her eyes fell on the lettering which proclaimed the jewels her very own, and opened the case

It was empty!

The slope of the raised centre of violet velvet was ruffled a little, like a bed that had been slept in. That was all.

She looked suddenly in his eyes, half amused, half accusingly, for she thought he had played her some tricks. His face was grave and startled.

"What does it mean, Syd, are you playing games?" But she knew from his face he was quite serious even while she asked.

"I cannot make it out, Lil," he said in an altered voice. "I cannot make it out at all. I brought the case just as it was from Mr. Ophir's. He told me he had just put the diamonds in and sealed it up with his own hands. See, you have not even broken the seals," and Harcourt mechanically picked up the litter of paper and twine from the floor. "No one touched it since except myself and you, and the diamonds are gone. Old Ophir would no more dream of playing such a trick than an Archbishop."

He stared ruefully at the

expanse of violet velvet. "The first thing is to see Mr. Ophir," he said.

"Oh, don't leave me, Syd."

"Well, to write to him then. There must be some ridiculous mistake somewhere. Perhaps he gave me the wrong case. He would never—No, that's too absurd."

Lilian sat him down to a pretty mother-of-pearl and tortoise-shell table with violet-scented ink in the silver-mounted bottles.

He growled a bit at the dainty feminine pen and paper and began:

Dear Mr. Ophir; A most extraordinary thing has happened. I took the case you gave me, as you gave it to me, straight to Miss Ray, Belgrave Street, and opened it without breaking the seals, by cutting the strings in her presence. The diamonds were gone. Perhaps you may be able to clear up the mystery. If you suspect dishonesty, engage a detective at once. The driver will wait for a reply. Yours in haste,

Sydney Harcourt.

He ran downstairs himself to hail a cab to take the note. A smart hansom with an alert driver on the box was crawling up the street. The driver took the letter, listened to Harcourt's instructions, touched his hat, and was off like a shot.

"Oh, Sydney, do cheer up a little," pleaded Lilian, transformed quickly to comforter; "they will come all right. If they don't, I don't mind in the least. It wasn't your fault, anyway."

"Well, you see how it is, Lil; the infernal things—I beg your pardon. Don't mind me; I am terribly put out—you see, they were lost out of my hands. They were a mighty big prize for anyone to lay hands on, and I have been going the pace a bit before I met you, my darling, and many people think I have outrun the bailiff."

A little less than an hour later, a footman entered, bearing in the very centre of a silver salver a visiting card slightly soiled. Harcourt took it, and Lilian, peering over his shoulders, read the inscription:

MR. ALFRED JUGGINS.

Private Detective.

"What is he like, Tomlinson?"

"Stout party in black, sir. He doesn't seem particularly bright."

"Well, show him up."

Mr. Alfred Juggins slouched furtively into the room, keeping his back as much as possible to the light as if secrecy had grown a habit with him. He was a stout, clumsily-built man in shining black cloth, suggesting rather the notion of a respect-

able retired milkman than a detective.

As he entered Lilian thought she noticed one quick, keen glance at where the empty jewel-case lay on the table and the tangle of paper and twine under it. But before she could be sure, the expression vanished from his eyes like a transparency when the light goes out.

Harcourt knew the man by reputation as one of the cleverest detectives in London. But looking at him now he could hardly believe the reputation.

"Mr. Juggins," he said, "will you take a chair. You come, I presume about—"

"About those diamonds," said Mr. Juggins abruptly without making any motion to sit down. "I was fortunately with Mr. Ophir when your note came. He asked me to take charge of the case. Your cabman lost no time, and here I am."

"He told you the facts."

"Very briefly."

"And you think—"

"I don't think. I am quite sure I know where and how to lay my hand on the diamonds."

"I am delighted you think so," said Harcourt; "I am exceedingly anxious about the matter. Did Mr. Ophir suggest—"

"Nothing," broke in Mr. Juggins again. "I didn't want his suggestions. Time is of importance, not talk. Is that the jewel-case?"

"Yes," said Harcourt, taking it up and opening it; "just as it came, empty."

Mr. Juggins abruptly closed it again and put it in his pocket. "That's the paper and twine that was around it, I suppose?"

Harcourt nodded. Mr. Juggins picked it up carefully and put it in the other pocket.

"I must wish you good-day, Mr. Harcourt," said the unceremonious detective. "Good-day, miss."

"Have you finished your investigations already?" said Harcourt in surprise. "Surely you cannot have already found a clue?"

"I have found all I wanted and expected to. I see my way pretty plainly to lay my hands on the thief."

He was manifestly eager to be on his mission. Almost before Harcourt could reply he was out of the room and down the stairs.

He had not disappeared five minutes down one side of the street, when another hansom, driven at a rapid pace, came tearing up the other. Lilian Ray and Sydney Harcourt had not got well over their surprise at his abrupt departure, when a

second knock came to the door, and Tomlinson entered again with a salver and card—a clean one this time.

MR. ALFRED JUGGINS.

Private Detective.

Harcourt started, and Lillian uttered a little cry. "The same man, Tomlinson?" Harcourt asked.

"The same, sir; leastways he seems a very absent-minded gentleman. 'Anyone been here for the last half-hour,' he said breathless like when I opened the door. 'You was, sir,' I said, 'not five minutes' ago.' 'Oh, was I,' says he, with a queer kind of a laugh, 'that's quick and no mistake. Am I here now? Shall I show him up, sir?'"

"Of course."

"What can it mean?" cried Lillian. "Surely he cannot have found them in five minutes?"

There was a slight, indescribable change in the manner of Mr. Juggins as he now entered the room. He was less furtive and less abrupt in his movements, and he seemed no longer anxious, as before, to keep his back to the light.

"You are back again very soon, Mr. Juggins," said Harcourt; "have you got a clue?"

"I wish I had come five minutes sooner," said Mr. Juggins, his voice quite changed. "I'm afraid I have lost a clue. Where is the jewel-case?"

"Why, I gave it to you not ten minutes ago."

"To me?" said Mr. Juggins, and then stopped. "Oh, yes, you gave it to me. Well, and what did I do with it?"

"I don't understand you in the very least."

"Well, you need not understand me. But you can answer me. I come from Mr. Ophir."

"You said that before."

"Did I? Well, I say it again. I come from Mr. Ophir commissioned to find those diamonds, and I ask you as civilly as may be, what has been done with the jewel-case?"

"You put it in your pocket, Mr. Juggins, and carried it away," said Lillian Ray.

"Was I in a hurry, Miss?"

"You were in a great hurry."

"Was I dressed as I am now?"

"Exactly."

"Figure and face just the same?"

"Well, yes. I thought you were more made up than you are now."

"Made up?"

"Well, Mr. Juggins, there was a trace of rouge on your cheeks."

"And I kept my back to the light, I warrant."

"Your memory is wonderful."

Mr. Juggins chuckled, and Harcourt broke in angrily:

"Don't you think we've had enough of this foolery, sir?"

"More than enough," said Mr. Jiggins calmly. "I have the honour to wish you a very good-morning, Mr. Harcourt, and you, miss."

"Oh, Syd!" Lilian cried, as the door closed behind him, "isn't it just thrilling?"

"Which! What in the world do you mean. They are both the same Mr. Jiggins."

Meanwhile, Mr. Jiggins was driving as fast as a hansom can carry him back to Mr. Ophir's, in Bond Street. He found the eminent jeweller in his little glass citadel at the back of his glittering warehouse.

"Well?" Ophir said, when Mr. Jiggins stepped into the little glass room.

"Well," responded the detective, "I can make a fair guess who has the diamonds."

"Mr. Harcourt was rather a wild young man before this engagement," said Mr. Ophir.

"Who made the new case for you?" said Mr. Jiggins.

"Mr. Smithson, one of the most competent and reliable men in the trade. He has done all our work for the last twenty years."

"Who brought it here?"

"One of Mr. Smithson's men."

"I think you told me this man saw you put the diamonds

into the case, and seal them up for Mr. Harcourt?"

"Yes. He was standing only a few yards off at the time. There were two of my own men standing close by also, if you would care to examine them."

"Never mind," said Mr. Jiggins. "I don't want to see them just yet. But I will trouble you for Mr. Smithson's address, if you please. I have an idea he's a man who would be useful, if we could lay our hands on him."

"Mr. Jiggins, I think my own men will be much more satisfactory witnesses. Besides, you may have some trouble finding him."

The detective looked at him curiously for a moment. "Many thanks for your advice, Mr. Ophir," he said, quietly; "but I think I will take my own way, if you please."

Twenty minutes afterwards the indefatigable Mr. Jiggins was at Mr. Smithson's workshop cross-examining the proprietor; but nothing came of it. The man who brought the case to Mr. Ophir's establishment was the man who made it. He was the best workman that Mr. Smithson ever had, though he only had him for ten days. He seemed hard up, and offered himself for very moderate wages. But before he was half-an-hour in the place he

showed what he could do. So when the order came in for a case for the Harcourt diamonds, Mr. Smithson set him on the job."

"But how did he manage at home. You surely did not let him take the diamonds home with him?"

"Bless you," cried Mr. Smithson briskly, "he never saw the diamonds, and never will see them."

"Then how did he make the case to fit them?"

"We had a model—the old case."

"Have you got it still?"

"Yes, I think it is somewhere about. Excuse me for a moment."

He returned with a rubbed and faded jewel-case covered with what had once been dark green morocco. Inside, the white velvet had grown yellow with age.

"That was our model, Mr. Juggins. You see in the raised centre the place for the great star. The necklace ran round this slope."

"I see," said Mr. Juggins. Then, after a pause: "You can let me have this old case, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"By-the-way, Mr. Smithson," Mr. Juggins said carelessly, "did Mr. Mulligan—I think you said that was his

name—say anything about Mr. Ophir?"

"Well, Mr. Juggins, now that you mention it, he did. When he first came he asked me did I not do work for Mr. Ophir. He said he thought he could get a recommendation from him if I wanted it, but I didn't. His work was recommendation enough."

Mr. Juggins put the case in his coattail pocket, and moved towards the door. He paused on the threshold.

"Mr. Mulligan did not turn up in the afternoon, I suppose?" said Mr. Juggins.

"He did not. I gave him something extra for the way the thing was done and I fear he may have been indulging. But how did you guess it?"

"From something Mr. Ophir said," replied Mr. Juggins.

"But he is coming back in the morning. I have promised him double wages. I can give you his address if you want him meanwhile."

"Thanks. I fancy I will find him when I want him. Good-day Mr. Smithson. By-the-way, I would not advise you to count on Mr. Mulligan's return tomorrow morning."

MR. JUGGINS had dismissed his hansom when he went into Mr. Smithson's. He was only a few streets from the

Strand, and he now walked very slowly in that direction.

"He's my man," he said to himself. "He must help whether he likes it or not. If he helps me to unravel this business I'll take care he gets his share of the credit."

Mr. Juggins stopped abruptly as he glanced at a church clock. "Four o'clock," he muttered. "Four is his hour. I suppose I'll find him at the old spot." He set off in the direction of Simpson's restaurant in the Strand.

Monsieur Grabeau was at this time the cleverest and most popular drawing-room entertainer in London. He was a marvellous mimic and ventriloquist, a quick change artist, but above all and beyond all, a conjuror. He could manoeuvre a pack of cards as an Army captain his company. In the construction and manufacture of mechanical tricks and toys he was possessed of a skill and ingenuity almost beyond belief.

Mr. Juggins had met M. Grabeau at some of those social functions where the introduction of a detective, either as a footman or a musician, had been thought a prudent precaution, and the acquaintance between them had ripened into companionship, if not friendship. Mr. Juggins' profession had an intense attraction for

the Frenchman, who knew all Gaboriau's detective novels by heart.

Naturally, when Mr. Juggins got tangled over the vanishing diamond puzzle, he was anxious to consult his friend, Mr. Grabeau. He hoped he'd be there, as he entered Simpson's restaurant.

Monsieur Grabeau was there at his accustomed place at a corner table, at his accustomed dinner—a plate of roast beef underdone. For M. Grabeau affected English dishes and English cookery, and liked the honest, substantial fare of Simpson's.

A stout, good-humoured man was M. Grabeau, with a quick eye, a close cropped shiny black head, and a smooth cream-coloured face.

"Hullo!" he cried out pleasantly, "that is you? *Bonsoir*, Monsieur Juggins. I hope that you carry yourself well."

Mr. Juggins nodded, hung up his hat, and seated himself at the opposite side of the table. "Broiled mutton," he said to the waiter, "and a pint of stout."

"The fact is, monsieur," Mr. Juggins went on in much the same tone when the waiter whisked away to execute his order, "I wanted to have a word with you."

"Ah-hah! I know," said M. Grabeau vivaciously. "It's the

Harcourt diamonds that have come to you, is it not? The wonderful diamonds of which one talked all the evening at the Harcourt reception. They have disappeared, and his lordship has employed M. Juggins, the great detective. I thought you would come to me. It's all here," and he handed him across the table the newspaper he had been reading, with his finger on a prominent paragraph headed in big letters:

THE VANISHING DIAMONDS

Quite a sensation has been created in fashionable London by the sudden disappearance—it would perhaps be premature to say robbery—of the famous "Harcourt Heirloom," perhaps, after the Crown Jewels, the most famous and valuable diamonds in London. Our representative learned from the eminent jeweller, Mr. Ophir, of Bond Street, that he had with his own hands this morning put the jewels into a case, sealed up the parcel and handed it to the Hon. Mr. Sydney Harcourt. Mr. Harcourt, on the other hand, states that when the case was opened in his presence by his fiancée, Miss Ray—for whom the jewels were meant as a wedding present—it was empty. If Mr. Ophir and the Hon. Sydney Harcourt both speak the truth—and we have no

reason to doubt either, or both—the diamonds must have vanished through the case and brown paper in the hansom cab en route between Bond Street and Upper Belgrave Street. We understand that the famous detective, Mr. Juggins, at the instance of Mr. Ophir, called later on at Upper Belgrave Street. He has a clue as a matter of course. A clue is one of those things that no well-regulated detective is ever without.

M. Grabeau watched Mr. Juggins eagerly, reading his face as he read the paper. "Well," he asked impatiently when Mr. Juggins at length came to the end, "It is all right there?"

"Pretty accurate for a newspaper reporter!"

"And you have got the clue—you, the famous detective."

There was the faintest suggestion of a sneer, which Mr. Juggins never appeared to resent or even notice in the least.

"Well, yes, monsieur, I think I have a bit of a clue. But I came to hear your notion of the business."

"You must first tell me all—everything."

Mr. Juggins told him all—everything—with admirable candour, not forgetting the doubling of his own character at Belgrave Street.

"Well," he said at last, "what do you think, monsieur?"

"M. Ophir," said M. Grabeau sharply.

"No!" cried Mr. Juggins, in a tone of surprise and admiration. "You don't say so! You don't think then that young Harcourt himself made away with the stones?"

"No, my friend, believe me. His father, he is rich; his lady, she is beautiful. The risk is too great, even if he have debts, which is not proved."

"But how did Mr. Ophir get them out of the case?"

"He did not ever put them in, my friend."

"I thought I told you that three people saw him put them in—two of his own men and the messenger, a Mr. Mulligan, who came from the casemaker."

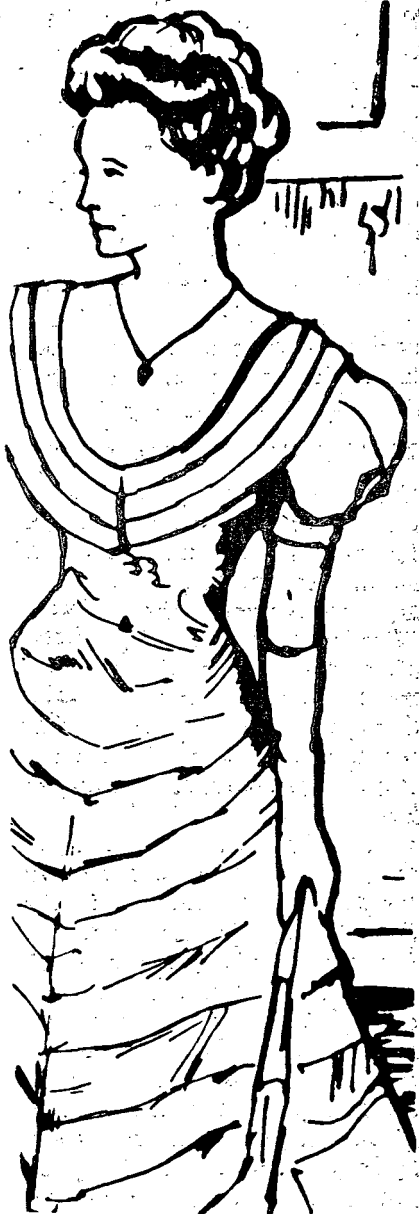
"That messenger—you have seen him then?"

"Well, no. He had not come back to his place of employment."

"And he will never come. He has vanished. M. Ophir perhaps could tell where he has vanished, but he will not."

"But the other two men saw the jewels packed?"

"*Helas!* my great detective, are you not a little innocent today? You will not think harm of M. Ophir. *Tres bien*. But give me a moment your watch and chain."



He leant across the table and as if by magic Mr. Juggins' watch and chain were in his hands. A heavy gold watch with a gold chain that fitted to the waistcoat buttonhole with a gold bar.

"Now observe, this will be our case." With rapid, dexterous fingers he fashioned the copy of the newspaper into the semblance of a jewelcase with a closely-fitted lid. He opened the box wide, put the watch and chain in so that Mr. Juggins could see it plainly inside, and closed the lid with two fingers only.

He pushed the box across the tablecloth to Mr. Juggins, who opened it and found it empty.

"But where has it gone to?" he cried.

"Behold, it is there," said M. Grabeau, tapping him lightly on the capacious waistcoat.

The watch was comfortably back in Mr. Juggins' waistcoat pocket, and the gold bar of the chain was again securely fastened in his waistcoat buttonhole.

"I could have sworn I saw you put it into the case and leave it there."

Eh bien! So could the men of this M. Ophir of whom you speak. I put it in your pocket, he put it in his own."

"But, monsieur, M. Ophir

has the name of a most respectable man."

M. Grabeau snapped his fingers. "This man," he said, "I know him, I have had what you call shufflings, dealings, with him. He is cold, but he is cunning. He called me—me, Alphonse Grabeau, one cheat. Now, I, Alphonse Grabeau, call him, M. Ophir, one thief, and I will prove it."

"I am much obliged, monsieur. Where can I see you to-morrow?"

"I will be in my leetle establishment until two hours of the afternoon. At four I will be here at my dinner. In the evening I will be in the saloon of the Duke of Doubleditch. But you must be punctual for I am a man of the minute."

"Very well, if I don't see you at the shop I will see you at dinner."

M. Grabeau drained the last drops of his glass of whiskey and water, picked up his cane, hat and gloves, took a cigarette from his neat little silver case and stuck it in his mouth unlighted.

Mr. Juggins rose at the same moment. "Good-evening, monsieur," he said admiringly, "I always thought you were almighty clever, but I never rightly knew how clever you are until to-night."

M. Grabeau beamed at the compliment, and went out.

Mr. Juggins called for a second helping of boiled mutton, and ate it slowly.

Something of special importance must plainly have detained Mr. Juggins, for it was a quarter past two next day when he walked with quick slinging step up to the "leetle establishment" of M. Grabeau, in Wardour Street. There was a young man of about nineteen years alone behind the counter.

"Good-day, Jacob," said Mr. Juggins; "master out?"

"Just gone a quarter of an hour ago."

"Oh, well, I'll see him later on. By-the-way, Jacob, that coral necklace and brooch there in the window. Will you let me have a peep at it?"

Jacob took the case from the window and set it on the counter. Mr. Juggins inspected the trinkets carefully for full five minutes with intent admiration; turning the case round several times to get a better view. He seemed much interested in a smear of what looked like damp gum on the edge of the leather.

"What's the damage, Jacob?" he asked.

"Not for sale, sir. Master cautioned me four different times—not for sale, no matter what price I might be offered.

Not likely to be tempted much, I should say; there is not half-a-sovereign's worth of gold in the lot."

"Ah!" said Mr. Juggins meditatively, then persuasively. "Well, it is not so much the red affairs I want as the box they are in. You were not forbidden to sell the box, were you, Jacob? It doesn't seem to fit these things as if they were made for them, does it?"

"It fits them most beautifully, Mr. Juggins. But there, don't go. I won't say I won't sell it to oblige a friend of the master, if I get a fair price for it."

"What do you call a fair price?"

"What would you say to a sovereign now?"

Mr. Juggins said nothing to a sovereign. But he produced the coin in question from his waistcoat pocket and placed it on the counter, turned the contents of the case out in a jingling heap, put the case itself in his pocket, and walked out of the shop.

Mr. Juggins let himself in with a latchkey, and walked noiselessly upstairs to his own pretty little sitting-room on the drawing-room floor. He took the old case from his pocket and set it beside another old case—the one he got from Mr. Smithson.

The two cases were alike, though not identical in form; he opened them. Inside the shape was almost precisely the same. Mr. Juggins walked to the door, closed it softly, and turned the key in the lock.

LILIAN RAY and Mister Sydney Harcourt were sitting on the sofa in her drawing-room, and she played with his curls as she bent caressingly over him.

A sharp knock came to the door, and the footman entered.

"Mr. Juggins, sir," said the footman.

"Show him up."

"I won't detain you a moment, Mr. Harcourt," said the imperturbable Mr. Juggins, walking quietly into the room.

"You have got a clue, then."

"Well, yes, I think I may say I have got a clue."

He took from his coattail pocket the old jewel-case which he had purchased for a sovereign, and set it on the table.

"You see this, miss. Is it at all like the case that came with the diamonds?"

"The case that came without the diamonds you mean, Mr. Juggins?" said Lilian. "It is just like it in shape, but the other was quite new and shining."

"That is a detail, miss. Now will you kindly open it?"

As Lilian opened it she

thrilled with the sudden unreasonable notion that the diamonds might be inside. But it was quite empty.

"The inside is just the same, too," she said, "only this is so faded!"

"Would you oblige me by taking the case in your hands for one moment. No, don't close it. Now will you kindly put your thumb here, and your other thumb here on the opposite side?"

Mr. Juggins guided her slender little thumbs to their places while Harcourt looked on in amazement.

"Now, miss, kindly squeeze both together."

Lilian gave a quick, sharp gasp of delight and surprise. For suddenly, as if by magic, there blazed on the slope of faded velvet a great circle of flashing diamonds with a star of surpassing splendour in the centre.

"Oh!" she cried breathlessly.

"They are too beautiful, for anyone. Oh, Syd," turning to her fiancé with eyes brighter than the jewels, "did you ever see anything so beautiful? They dazzle my eyes and my mind together. I cannot look at them any longer," and she closed the case with a snap, and turning to the placid detective: "Oh, how clever you were to find them, Mr. Juggins. Wasn't he, Syd?"

She so bubbled over with delight and admiration and gratitude that even the detective was captivated.

"Will you open the case again, miss?" he said. She raised the lid and was struck dumb with blank amazement.

The case was empty.

"A trick-case," said Harcourt after a pause.

"Just so, sir, that's the whole story in three words. About as neat a bit of work as ever came out of hands. No wonder. Twenty thousand pounds, more or less, was the price the maker wanted for it."

"And the diamonds are safe inside," cried Lilian; "they were there all the time, and I have only to squeeze with my thumbs and they will come out again. It's ^{good} wonderful! I hope the maker will be well paid?"

"He'll be well paid, miss," said Mr. Jiggins, a little grimly, "though not perhaps in the coin he expected."

"But however did you find it out? You must be most wonderfully clever."

Mr. Jiggins actually blushed at the compliment as he said, "A little common-sense, miss, that's all."

"When did you guess the

diamonds were in the case?" said Harcourt.

"I guessed it, sir, when I saw Mr. Ophir, and I was sure of it when I saw you. You see how it is, sir, if Mr. Ophir put the diamonds into the case and no one took them out, it stood to reason they were still there."

"It sounds quite simple," murmured Lilian, "when you are told it."

"Of course, when I found my double had been for the case; it made certainly doubly certain."

"Your *double*! Then you were right, Lilian; there were two Mr. Juggineses."

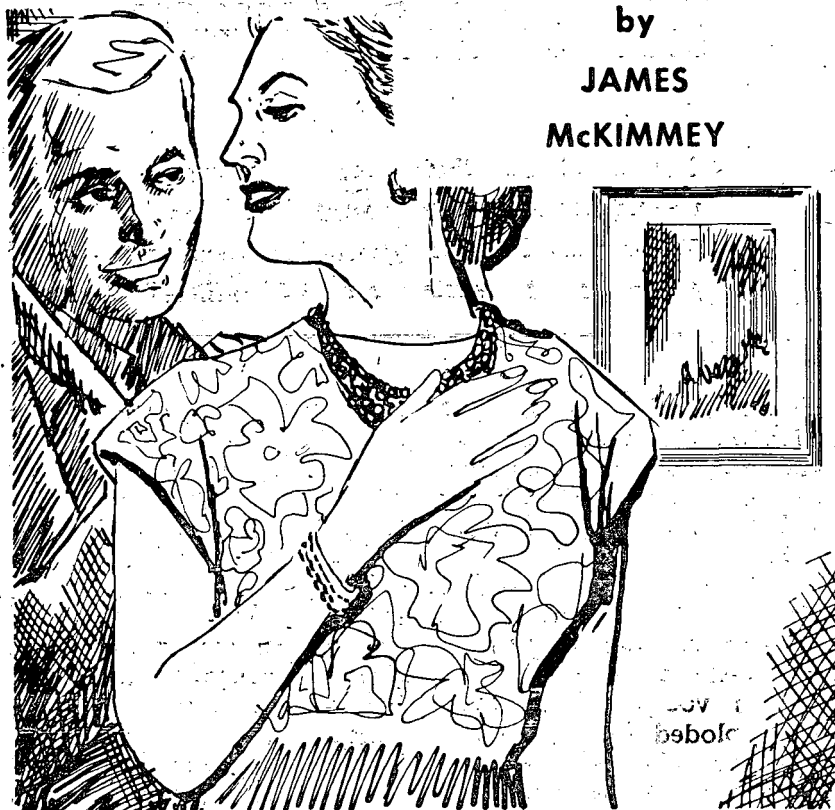
"Of course. I am always right."

"Might I ask, sir," continued Harcourt, "which are you?"

"He's the second Mr. Jiggins, of course, Syd. How can you be so silly? But I want to know where is the first Mr. Jiggins; the man with the beautiful hands?"

"The first Mr. Jiggins, miss, otherwise Mulligan, otherwise Monsieur Grabeau, is in gaol at present, awaiting his trial. He was arrested this afternoon by appointment at Simpson's restaurant by the second Mr. Jiggins."

by
**JAMES
McKIMMEY**



SMITHERTON sat in his usual place near the swimming pool, gazing first at the giant diamond and ruby necklace worn by the regal-looking Perle Van Horne, then at the matching earrings weighting her ear lobes.

"Eh, Richard?" Loy Van Horne, Perle's husband, said to Smitherton. "Agree or not?"

"I didn't hear it, Loy,"

Smitherton said pleasantly. Browned so that his graying temples were shown off dramatically, he was wearing a blue velour shirt, white tennis shorts, blue crew socks and white tennis shoes.

"Richard," Honey Meadows said, giggling, lifting her drink, her cinnamon eyes mischievous and flirting. She ran her fingers through her hone-colored hair

THE BORED BUNCH

The world was theirs and everything in it—and how utterly boring it all was! There must be other games for them to play—like a little bit of killing?

with such sensual abandon that it looked to be nearly an involuntary gesture. "You must have started drinking before we got here! You're sitting there absolutely in a dream!"

"He's having a Maryless vodka, dear," Eloise Smitherton said, wrinkling her pretty nose at her husband.

"Less vodka!" Hugh Meadows exploded. A lean, fine-featured man he was with a drooping mustache who was not yet thirty-five, dressed in a similar manner to Smitherton's. "Pete!" he called to a muscular man replacing bottles to an outdoor bar near the terrace entrance of the sprawling home inhabited by Richard and Eloise Smitherton. "Another round, and let's get some liquor into poor Richard this time."

But Richard Smitherton shook his head at Pete, whose eyes on either side of his broken fighter's nose were now showing the dark hatred of a

have-not listening to the banter of the haves.

"I don't know what's got into him lately," Eloise Smitherton said, looking at her husband with clear, curious eyes. She did not have the obvious look of someone born into wealth as did Perle Van Horne, although she had been. But that was possibly because, Smitherton had decided, her family had been in beer instead of in stocks and bonds, as had been the case with Perle's family. Rather, she had a sweet, fresh, young-girl appearance, although she was thirty-seven. And she made no attempt to adorn her new-flower beauty with the kind of flamboyant jewelry that Perle Van Horne was wearing.

And again Smitherton found himself examining the necklace and earrings, fascinated with them now, finding a vague idea forming somewhere in the back of his brain on this sunny

Sunday morning by the pool as ex-fighter Pete made drinks as part of his general capacity as the Smithertons' cook, bartender, chauffeur and general handy man.

"Well, vodka hasn't got into him, anyway," said Loy Van Horne, oldest of them all at fifty and sixty pounds overweight. He was also wearing tennis clothes, which were definitely not for him, Smitherton thought wryly.

Where had the tennis gone anyway? Smitherton wondered. Too much trouble, obviously. Too much trouble to collect the rackets and balls and walk to the courts beyond and start exerting one's self. Which was why Smitherton had taken up a series of morning exercises in his own bedroom, to keep from developing Loy Van Horne's obesity.

But how did Hugh Meadows stay in such splendid shape? he wondered. A natural condition, he decided, possibly supplemented by some of that same deliberate exercise. But maybe that would change pretty quickly, Smitherton thought.

Hugh Meadows was a self-made man, who had built a financial-consultant firm from scratch, after having grown up in a ghetto neighborhood in the city. He'd been able to sell the firm at a tremendous profit and

retire at an extremely early age. And now, with all material matters in hand, perhaps he would start softening, fattening, promising himself the action he would never take, the situation already owned by Loy Van Horne. Or perhaps, Smitherton thought, the process had already begun.

"Let's get back to it," Loy Van Horne said to Smitherton. "I say the ones who have not a quid are the ones who have it made. There is where it is, my boy. In the not having. Because once you've got something, you've got something to worry about in the dead of the night, something to weigh your shoulders. But when you have nary a bean, you are as free as a bird. Right, my boy? The *only* way to go!"

Hugh Meadows began laughing as an angry-looking Pete brought the drinks to the table around which the six of them sat.

Loy Van Horne's round, unlined face took on a pixy-like expression as he said to Meadows, "Why do you laugh? You keep reminding us you came from nothing, eh? But now that you have all, are you happier, freer, more gay?"

Hugh Meadows' laughter stopped. His eyes took on a brooding look.

"I tell you," Van Horne

went on, "some mornings I am close to chucking it. Every snit. Dump it off to a dozen decent charities. Go on welfare, eh? What do you think of that, my young friend?"

The young man uttered a single syllable.

Van Horne sighed, shaking his head, saying, "Not polite, Hugh."

"Well, but that's what it is, you know," Perle Van Horne said archly. "Just what he said it was. And if you wish to go on welfare, darling, go. But you'll go alone."

"Yes, but I think what Loy means is," Eloise Smitherton said, "what's really in it any more?" She drew an imaginary sphere with her delicate hands. "Where's all the fun gone, in our world? Why don't we do all of the things we used to do? Dinner parties. Those marvelous barbecues we all had. We used to dance, sing, and be happy and free and gay. Now—"

"Well," Hugh Meadows said grimly, "maybe we're simply tired of each other."

"Oh, now, Hugh," Loy Van Horne said, leaning over to touch the younger man's wrist, "you've taken offence again, haven't you? Simply because I brought up your rather meager beginnings. Now that's absolute rot, isn't it? You shouldn't wear

your background on your shoulder in that fashion, my boy. You should be proud of having accomplished what you have. Perle and I and Eloise—well, we were simply born into it. And what sort of accomplishment is that, really?" Van Horne smiled with deference and leaned back in his chair.

Smitherton made a point of studying one of his tennis shoes, smiling vaguely, thinking that, yes, Loy had left him out, as well as Honey Meadows. Because Honey had been a hotel band singer before Hugh Meadows had found her. And he, Smitherton, had never been anything, really.

The paternal family fortune had been nearly dissipated before his late father had inherited what he had. Then, with incredible speed and inventiveness, his father had lost that and his now-dead mother's small fortune. As a result, they had persisted through the balance of their lives under the chill of steady bitterness.

Yet it wasn't that Smitherton had actually been deprived of necessities. It was simply that he didn't have all of the things the others in his inherited social status owned. And so he had meant to become a successful architect. And he'd begun the effort by

getting a scholarship to the state university. He'd done very well in art courses. He'd gotten so good, in fact, that he'd sold enough oils to earn a trip to France one summer, where, in Biarritz, he'd met Eloise.

Then, after that, a quick marriage. And somehow there was no point anymore in continuing his education or even his art. He had taken up photography a time ago. But there was no real point in that either, after all. And so he didn't do anything now including not playing tennis on Sunday mornings, as planned.

"Are we tired of each other?" Smitherton suddenly asked.

"Nonsense!" Eloise Smitherton said. "You know how difficult being around people you don't really know can be. Who was that last horrible couple?"

"The Switzels," Loy Van Horne said with disgust. "Miserable people!"

"So, no, I don't think we're tired of each other," Eloise said. "I just think we're bored."

"Well," Honey Meadows said slowly, looking at Smitherton flirtatiously again, "maybe we should try something new. You know. Like getting to know each other even better? And then—

"Ah, Honey," her husband

said wearily, "sometimes you act like the broad you are."

Honey giggled and continued flirting with Smitherton. Smitherton realized that nobody had honestly been offended by the inference, even including Eloise. Dangerous, he thought.

"But don't you see?" Loy Van Horne said. "All of this makes my point, doesn't it? If we didn't have a bloody bob, we wouldn't be bored, would we? So I'm absolutely right. It's the poor who own the good life, isn't it? By George, I just may do it! Tomorrow morning! Give off the entire batch of it. Throw myself on charity and live it up, eh? Pete, another round!"

As Pete, shifting his shoulders meanly, began making new drinks, Smitherton found himself again examining the giant necklace and earrings worn by Perle Van Horne.

AFTER THE usual brunch, the gathering dissolved, also as usual. Everyone retired to beds to nap away the effects of the drinks and food—everyone except Smitherton, who went into his study and got out his camera case to examine a collection of the best equipment available. Included was a 400 mm long lens he'd never tried, to date. And he thought for a moment of putting it on

one of his single-lens reflex cameras and going out to find a bird to shoot. But a picture of a bird, he decided, was not really what he was seeking.

And so he sat down in a large leather chair and steeped his fingers and thought again of Perle Van Horne's necklace and earrings. She owned an incredible amount of jewelry. But those huge earrings and necklace were her favorites and were the most valuable. Smitherton had often heard Loy Van Horne scold her for not keeping them in their wall safe when she went to bed. But her response was that she simply could not live apart from them. And so they were always beside her, on a night stand, when she slept.

"Well," he said finally, aloud, and showered and dressed and went downstairs to join Eloise, who was awake again, for cocktails. It was true that he'd given up alcohol mornings, simply because it made him groggy the entire day. But he wasn't going to give up the late-afternoon booze. He had to have something to look forward to, after all.

But perhaps, he thought, mixing the martinis himself because Pete always got Sunday evenings off, there was something more to look forward to than just booze—if he had the nerve to go ahead and do it.

Later, after he'd said good night to Eloise, he retired to his own bedroom, considered, nodded, then changed his clothes to an old pair of slacks, T shirt, a windbreaker, the tennis shoes he'd worn earlier in the day, and a pair of thin leather gloves. He wrote a quick note and placed it on his bed. It said:

Eloise—if you should awaken, I'm in the darkroom. Had the sudden urge to do some photography. Can't be disturbed, you know, what with developer and fixer and printing paper and all that. Love you.

Then he carefully opened the door of his bedroom and went down the steps. He used a hallway to the rear, passing the room where Pete lived; he could hear bottle clicking against glass and the drunken grumblings of an angry man. Finally, then, he was in the long sloping moonlit terrace behind the house, running toward the alley.

Keeping in shadows, he loped five blocks, breathing rapidly, feeling his blood flowing. When he reached the back of the Van Hornes' estate, he ran along a white-pebbled path to a door which led to a sunroom. He knew very accurately that the lock there was broken, because Loy Van Horne had mentioned it only that morning. The door opened

easily, and Smitherton made his way knowingly through the dark but familiar house.

When he was on the second floor, he moved inchingly down a hall, then, using great care, his heart pounding, he opened another door and stepped into Perle Van Horne's bedroom.

She was sleeping with her face dimly lit by moonlight and a night lamp on the stand beside the bed which also held her earrings and necklace as well as a telephone.

Smitherton took a breath, then crossed the room on tip-toe, stopping once when floor boards creaked, waiting to see if she might awaken, wondering what possibly he would manage to say to her if she did. But she did not awaken. And he continued, gathered up the jewelry, stuffed it in his pockets, and then returned to the door.

Minutes later he was out of the house moving back to his own. He went back along the hallway, passing Pete's room again, listening to the same click of glass, the same grumbling. And then he went down to the basement and his well-appointed darkroom, where he placed the jewelry in a box containing his photographic paper. He sat down then and remained for quite a time, feeling more alive than he

could remember since he and Eloise had been married, still dimly hearing Pete's drinking activity through a ventilator shaft.

Then he went back upstairs to his bedroom, undressed, got into his bed, and lay there with a broad smile on his lips. He wanted to laugh aloud, raucously, but he resisted it. And finally, although he'd imagined he might not sleep for hours, he fell asleep instantly, to rest better than he had in months or possibly years.

The group assembled again the next day, this time in the Van Hornes' gigantic living room, where the walls were decorated with a wide variety of animals heads brought back from Africa, India and South America. Smitherton couldn't prove that white hunters had shot the beasts instead of Van Horne accomplishing the feats, as he'd claimed. But he'd gone with the man to the gun club to which they both belonged enough times, in the past, to know that he couldn't find the side of a large house at close range with a shotgun.

But that was obviously no matter to Van Horne on this late morning. The disappearance of his wife's jewelry, a discovery made several hours earlier, was the subject of concern. Van Horne was pacing

about the room lion-fashion, his eyes bright and alive. Perle Van Horne was seated with the rest of the group, which included Eloise and Richard Smitherton as well as Honey and Hugh Meadows, and she was also very excited and alert.

"Think of it!" she was saying. "Someone actually crept into my bedroom and took them right off the night stand and left! He had to be inches from me!" She took a long, shuddering breath as her husband popped his palms together, saying:

"Begger!"

"How dreadful," Eloise Smitherton whispered, shaking her head.

"Oh, yeah," Honey Meadows managed. "Wow!"

And then Honey's husband, Hugh asked, "But how did he know where they were?"

"Ah," said Loy Van Horne. "Conjecture at this point, of course. But the law is thorough, I'll tell you. Grilled us good, eh, Perle?"

"Did they ever," Perle replied.

"Several possibilities, including the fact that my wife fails to pull her shades every time she gets ready for bed."

"Now, Loy," Perle said.

"Might have seen her put the jewels on the stand, climb into bed, and then moved in when

they were pretty sure she'd fallen asleep."

"But how did whoever did it get in?" Smitherton asked, looking intensely interested.

"Sun porch, where the lock was broken."

"But how did they know about that?" Hugh Meadows asked.

"Might have tried every door possible and found the one to use. Should have had it fixed yesterday when I discovered it. But what would they have charged for coming out on a Sunday, eh?"

"Might have been cheaper than losing the jewelry," Smitherton said drily.

Loy Van Horne spread his hands, looking unworried. "Insured, you know. No trouble there."

"But I loved them, Loy," Perle said. "You can't know the feeling unless it's happened to you. An intruder, an absolute stranger, standing right there in my bedroom!"

Smitherton nodded, edging a glance at his wife to see that there was a glimmer of envy showing in her lovely eyes.

"I've got mixed emotions, really," Perle said. "I hate it that they're gone. But just to realize that someone was near enough to touch me—I mean, what if I'd awakened and started screaming? He could

have put his hands around my neck and choked me to death!"

"Perle," her husband said.

"Well, it could have happened! And it could happen again!" She reached out and tapped a telephone with a long extension placed on a cocktail table before her. "I'm never going to be any further from a phone than I am right now, in this house. And when the slightest thing happens, or looks out of place, or makes a noise, I'll—

"My Modigliani," Hugh Meadows said tensely.

"What?" Loy Van Horne asked.

"We're taking the Modigliani off the wall, Honey!" Meadows stated.

"Do you mean to sit there and honestly say that painting's an honest Modigliani?" Loy Van Horne said with surprise.

"Yes," Meadows whispered.

"But all along you've given the impression that it was a fake, a copy, something to brighten up the room! Now—

"Of course it's real!" Meadows snapped. "Once I knew anything about anything, I swore that one day I'd own a genuine Modigliani! So I worked and worked and worked! Then one day I bought it and put it on the wall! I didn't care if anybody else in the world knew it was real! Because I

knew it! And nobody's going to steal it off me now!"

"You know," Honey said, her pretty mouth forming a pout, "sometimes I think he loves that darned thing more than he does me."

"Oh, shut up, Honey!" Meadows said angrily.

Smitherton leaned forward. "Where are you going to put it, Hugh?"

Meadows sat stiffly, considering the possibilities. Then he said, nodding, "In the garage, with some old junk we've got out there, just as soon as we get home. Because who'd look for a genuine Modigliani in the garage with a bunch of junk, right?"

ELOISE Smitherton said the next day as she and Smitherton sat in his study following the exit of the Van Hornes and the Meadows, "Well, frightening, Richard. Weird, too. First Perle's most precious possession. Now Hugh's!"

Smitherton shook his head in wonderment.

"However did anyone know about that painting being genuine, let alone where he'd put it?"

"Baffling," said Smitherton.

"Well, I don't blame Perle for having telephones put in all over her house. Because you never know, do you?"



"Obviously not."

Eloise shivered. "It must be a truly terrifying experience, to be robbed like that. And have you noticed how both Loy and Perle have changed? I mean, they didn't even want a drink, did they? Had to keep on their toes, they said."

Smitherton examined his wife's eyes, seeing a glimmer of envy again. He tapped his knees with his forefingers, smiling distantly.

"And Hugh!" Eloise said. "He had an expression I remember he had when we

first met him, years ago. That fired-up look, all full of determination. Saying he was going to go to work on it himself, if the police can't find out who's doing this!"

"Well," Smitherton said carefully, "I guess that's the real Hugh Meadows, all right."

The door was opened then. Pete came in carrying a coffee tray with his gnarled fighter's hands, silent and dark-mooded. He put the tray down as Eloise said, "You needn't pour, Pete."

The large man nodded and left.

Eloise poured for both of them, lifted her cup, paused, then said, "Maybe it'll happen to us, Richard."

"Well," said Smitherton, "I certainly hope not."

"But if it does, I only hope I'm up to it. I mean, suppose this person came right into our house, the way he did at the Van Hornes and the Meadows, and I actually caught him in the act! I simply don't know my own reaction to a situation like that."

"Neither do I, to be honest," Smitherton said.

"Would I scream and cry and try to run? Or would I become very calm and remain silent and do exactly what he told me to do?"

Smitherton saw that his wife's expression was one of

high intensity. "But so far it's purely academic," he said.

"Yes," she said, "but it could happen and any minute. That's obvious!"

"Well, again—let's just hope it doesn't. But I wonder what he'd select, if he's of the mind? As an idle thought?"

"I know what I hope he wouldn't!" Eloise said with passion.

"What's that, Eloise?"

"Grandmother's sterling-silver flatware. I tell you, Richard, I'd simply die if that were taken. It's history, heritage, family! Please don't let him grab Grandmother's flatware!"

"Now let's see. We keep that in the safe in the basement, don't we?"

"Yes! I've never trusted that old thing, because I think you could yank the door right off, if you wanted to. And that's just where he'd look, wouldn't he? In the safe, for something valuable? So I'm going to put it some place else. Like—how about in the bathroom off my bedroom? Who'd ever think of looking for Grandmother's flatware in the bathroom? Am I right, Richard?"

When Smitherton returned from a long bicycle ride, carrying a camera with a telephoto lens with which he'd shot a starling, a robin and a

golden-crowned kinglet, he found the detective in the living room with Eloise.

"Lieutenant Dickery here," the man said standing, short, wide, with gray crew-cut hair. "You're Mr. Smitherton, I'm sure. I've seen your picture often in the society pages."

"How are you, Lieutenant?" Smitherton said. "And please sit down. I know why you're here, of course. Are you getting control again, dear?"

"I think so," Eloise said, blinking her delicate lashes rapidly. "I hope so."

"Well," the lieutenant said, "I have the report of the officers who arrived first. So I know basically that Mrs. Smitherton here moved the flatware from the safe in the basement to her bathroom at approximately one o'clock this afternoon. When she returned there about an hour later, it was gone."

"Correct," Smitherton said, nodding.

The lieutenant leaned forward, looking apologetic. "You know, Mr. Meadows put me on it after he'd lost the painting, although I must say that it crossed my mind, too, directly after the theft of Mrs. Van Horne's jewelry. And now—well, please don't feel that this in any way reflects upon the high esteem everyone in the

department holds for you and the Van Hornes and the Meadows. Both the chief and the commissioner, in fact, spoke to me today and asked that I treat these cases with great care and diplomacy.

"We have always appreciated your most generous contributions to the widows' fund, the ball, and all the rest that the three of you have done, you see. But I have to say it—this looks to be an inside job, Mr. Smitherton. There's no denying it, an inside job."

"Inside job!" Eloise said, gasping.

"Sorry to have said it," the lieutenant said. "But there it is."

"Then whom do you suspect, Lieutenant Dickery?" Smitherton said. "If I may ask?"

The lieutenant lowered his voice: "Your man Pete."

"Pete?" Smitherton said with a great deal of surprise.

"That fellow out trimming the rose bushes right now," the lieutenant said, nodding, leaning even farther forward, his voice becoming slightly conspiratorial. "Examine it, Mr. Smitherton. First Mrs. Van Horne's favorite necklace and earrings, with the thief entering through a door whose lock was broken. Then the Meadows' painting, taken from an unlock-

ed garage. Who knew the painting had been placed with a bunch of junk out there. Who, I ask?"

"Well," Smitherton said, "Elois  and I. Loy and Perle. And Honey and Hugh, of course."

"Any of the Van Hornes' help?"

"No," Smitherton replied. "None present when it was discussed."

"All right. Then did you and Mrs. Smitherton talk about it after you'd come home from the Van Hornes?"

Eloise said, "I suppose we might have. When Pete might have overheard? Mightn't we have, Richard?"

"I suppose. But—"

"You see?" the detective said. "Now when did you discuss Mrs. Smitherton's plan to move the flatware from the basement to her bathroom and where?"

"Late this morning," Smitherton said. "In my study."

"And don't you remember, Richard?" Eloise said excitedly. "Pete coming in with the coffee and then leaving? Why couldn't he have—"

"Stopped and listened to what was being said on the other side of the door?" the lieutenant finished with a look of satisfaction as he leaned back. "In perhaps the same way

he found out the exact spot where the Meadows painting had been foolishly placed. Do you follow me, Mr. Smitherton?"

"I follow you," Smitherton said, looking hurt. "But I don't want to go there."

"Of course you don't," the lieutenant said. "Hard to throw it on somebody you've put your faith in. But who else? Who else would have known Mrs. Van Horne's careless habit of keeping the necklace and earrings beside her bed at night? Had to come up any number of times when he was serving you drinks and the like. And he was also present when Mr. Van Horne was talking about the lock being broken on his sunroom door, wasn't he? Who else, I ask you? Isn't this all true?"

"Well, but—" Smitherton began.

"I'm going out to the rose bushes and arrest him!" the lieutenant said definitely.

"You can't, Lieutenant," Smitherton said.

"Why not, please?"

"Well, I recall Perle—Mrs. Van Horne—stating that she'd gone to bed at midnight and then awakened at about three to find her jewelry gone. So it had to have been taken during that three-hour interval."

"Of course!" the lieutenant

said. "That's an official record."

"But now I'm a photography enthusiast, you see. I couldn't sleep Sunday night. So I went down to my darkroom. There's a ventilator shaft that runs down there, so that I can hear every solitary sound made in Pete's room. I know he was in there when I went down, because I could hear him pouring liquor, bottle against glass, and he does drink, you know."

"That kept up until I returned to my bed, which was just after three. I tell you, Lieutenant, he simply could not have stolen Perle's jewelry!"

With disappointment obvious in his eyes, the detective said, "Well, I did receive the definite impression that the man owns an anti-social attitude, especially when it comes to what is, ah, truly social, if you know what I mean."

Smitherton spread his hands. "As for Hugh's Modigliani, I recall that he said he moved the painting from the wall and took it to his garage just at noon yesterday. He then had second thoughts on the wisdom of the action, and about forty minutes later returned to find it gone. Do you recall what you were doing from twelve until about a quarter to one yesterday, Eloise?"

"Upstairs fixing my face, I think," she said.

"Well, I was down here," Smitherton said. "I know positively that Pete was in the kitchen preparing our lunch during that entire time. So there you are, Lieutenant."

"Well..." the lieutenant said bleakly. "But the flatware in your wife's bathroom—"

"Now there you have me, Lieutenant," Smitherton said. "I'll have to admit that. Because after Eloise and I talked about her moving it, and she did, I went up to my bedroom for a short rest. I dozed off and slept for perhaps twenty minutes. So I can't tell you who might have sneaked down the hall to Eloise's bathroom and stolen the flatware."

"But I know it wasn't Pete!" Eloise exclaimed. "I was excited at first, so I wasn't thinking clearly. But I am now. I remember I went down and asked him to go out and check the roses with me. We did that and decided they needed trimming. It was while that was going on the flatware went. So Pete couldn't possibly have done it!"

The lieutenant sat shaking his head, shoulders drooping a bit.

"Baffling," he said.

"Well, now," Smitherton

said. "That's what I've said about it myself. Baffling."

THE LIEUTENANT had been gone less than a half hour when the telephone rang and Loy Van Horne said to Smitherton in an urgent, tense voice, "You and Eloise get over here right away, eh, Richard? I'm telling the Meadows to do the same. You won't believe this!"

Five minutes later Smitherton and his wife were seated with the Van Hornes and the Meadows in the large trophy-decorated room, where, Smitherton noted, there were now seven telephones. Hugh Meadows was saying, "I'm just wondering, Perle, why you're wearing the fur coat in here this way?"

Perle Van Horne smiled with satisfaction. "Because I'm hiding something under it. Shall I, Loy?"

"Straight ahead!" Van Horne said.

Stealthily, Perle reached insider her coat and removed the giant necklace and earrings, which she placed carefully on the cocktail table. The group stared at the jewelry as Van Horne began chuckling.

"But how?" Hugh Meadows asked at last.

"On Perle's night stand when she went upstairs not more than twenty minutes ago," Van

Horne said. "Begger must have found the damned basement door open—the gardener'd left it that way—then ran upstairs and left them where he'd found them!"

"But I don't understand!" Eloise Smitherton said incredulously. "Why?"

"Balmy, goofy, dingbats, I suppose," Van Horne said.

Perle Van Horne shuddered, saying, "A madman, surely. I'm going to have even more phones put in, because how in the world do you know what someone like that will do next?"

"Even so," Van Horne said. "There lies the jewelry. Eh?"

"And you've told the police?" Hugh Meadows asked.

Van Horne motioned a hand, looking sly. "Why?"

"Well, but—Meadows looked puzzled. "You've made a claim on the insurance."

"But think for a minute what the beggers charge. Dreadful rates! Why should we tell anyone else, eh?"

"Do you mean you're going to collect the claim and still keep the jewelry?" Smitherton asked, showing distinct surprise.

Van Horne smiled as his wife said, "And think of something else. The necklace and the earrings are different now, aren't they? I mean I loved them before. But I love them

even more now, because they're, well—"

"Secret?" Eloise Smitherton asked excitedly.

"Yes!" Perle said. "And dangerous, too! What if I wore them again! In public!"

"You wouldn't" Honey Meadows whispered.

"At the Cotillion?" Perle Van Horne said.

"You simply wouldn't dare!" Eloise breathed.

"Oh, wouldn't I? Think of it! People staring, not knowing, afraid to ask, whispering to each other!"

Smitherton examined the others, feeling the excitement growing. He tapped his knees with his forefingers and smiled, gently.

The next afternoon, when the six of them had gathered in the Meadows' highly modern living room to gaze at the Modigliani hanging on the wall again, Smitherton asked, "How did you happen on it in the garage again, Hugh?"

"Hunch," Meadows said. "Since he'd returned Perle's jewelry, thought he might do the same with the Modigliani. I was right."

Honey Meadows clasped her hands tightly together over her pretty knees, saying, "Terrifying, isn't it?"

"Yes!" Eloise Smitherton said, her eyes glowing. "But

what are you going to do now, Hugh?"

"Leave it where it is."

"And report it to the police and the insurance beggars?" Van Horne asked anxiously.

Hugh Meadows looked back at Van Horne with bright, tough eyes. "Nonsense, Loy."

"Well, now, yes, that's more or less how I look at it, too," Van Horne said with relief.

"The appraisal they gave it was a joke. It'll be worth ten times that in another five years. No, sir. There it is, there it's going to stay, no report."

"But what if people come in and say, 'Why there's your Modigliano,' Hugh?" Eloise asked.

"Who, but an absolute expert, would know if it was real or fake? Who did, in all the time I had it hanging there just like that? I'll tell people I had a phoney made. Hung it up to take the real thing's place."

Loy Van Horne was chuckling again.

"But somebody could find out," Honey said, her eyes wide and beautiful.

"Well," Hugh Meadows said, waving a hand carelessly, "that's a chance one takes if he's going to live dangerously."

The next evening, after the Van Hornes and the Meadows had left, Richard and Eloise Smitherton sat in the study,

examining the flatware in its velvet-lined case.

"Wise to have given Pete the evening off," Eloise said gravely.

"Well, he went straight for the neighborhood bar," Smitherton said, "and he's still there, you know."

"We can trust the Van Hornes and the Meadows, can't we?" she asked.

"I don't see why not," Smitherton said with surety.

"I don't either!" Eloise said ecstatically. "Do you know when I'm going to use it next?"

"You're actually going to use it?"

"We'll have a big early-fall dinner, like we used to do! At least thirty people, Richard, and I mean at table! Just think! All of them using it and wondering, wondering!"

Smitherton smiled faintly. "We could be found out, you know."

"Of course! And isn't it thrilling? Honestly?"

"Well, it is at that. I think I'll release a little tension by putting on the old tennis shoes and giving it a quick trot to the park and back."

"All right, dear. But be sure and see that all of the locks are on before you leave. You never know what someone as crazy as did all of this will try next, do you?"

"No," Smitherton agreed. "That's the devil of it. You just never do."

Wearing tennis shoes, Smitherton made his swift way to the back of the Van Hornes' house. With only a partial moon showing, so that it was easy enough for him to see that Perle's bedroom lights were on behind pulled shades, he began climbing a tall rock elm growing close beside the house. He stopped even with the second-floor windows. And there, perched on a limb, he got out a pair of small but efficient

cutters which he used to snip the telephone line leading out from the house.

When he reached the ground again, he hurried to the path covered with white pebbles and gathered up a handful. He looked at one of Perle Van Horne's bedroom windows, then he threw the pebbles upward where they struck glass with the sound of a dozen birds pecking.

He turned then and ran for home, trying to hold back the bubbling laughter rising inside of him.



In the Next Issue and Exclusively Yours—

DEATH STROLLS IN FLAMINGO PARK

The New Complete MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Hollywood had been her slave, Broadway had been at her feet. Mike Shayne nodded. Now she was playing her greatest—and final—role, with national headlines telling of her fame—and a murder bullet deep in her brain. Don't miss this engrossing Mike Shayne novel!

It was a fine party—until a corpse walked in...

A Paris Symposium

by

WILLIAM M. LEE

MY BOSS is a tycoon type character. He likes to make up business sayings such as "There's no more room at the top" and similar bons mots. He



is also dynamic. That day in Dolly's apartment he kept interrupting my reading.

"The lettuce is always greener on the other side of the fence," he said. "Find something people want and take it away from them."

Last year, by a series of mergers, my boss had become a very key figure in the numbers profession. Our executives had had very nice alibis for the times of the mergers, so there was not any question about monopoly.

We were, like I said, in Dolly's duplex apartment of Long Island, and our hostess was not up yet, so I was reading to my boss from Time, the weekly news magazine. He likes me to read to him, not that he is illiterate, but he does read slowly and often gets bored waiting to see how a sentence will turn out. I am a college type character myself, with a very exotic vocabulary. Sometimes I read books just for the hell of it.

I had just finished reading a piece about how a number of research type characters were leaving to attend a symposium in Paris, when he told me to wait up and what was a symposium.

"It's like a convention," I reported, "except more tax deductible. A lot of leading

characters get together for a meeting in Europe or elsewhere, and come back charged with many new ideas."

He began to push his lips in and out and I knew he was thinking because I had read a lot to him about Nero Wolfe. After a few minutes he said, "We'll go."

"Where?"

"To a symposium in Paris. What have I been talking about?"

"But there isn't any symposium," I objected. "Not for us."

My boss, waved that aside. "Arrange one. Alert our colleagues in la belle France and sunny Italy, not to mention jolly old England."

What a phrase maker! So far as I knew, we had no colleagues farther away than Auburn, New York.

My petite amie (French, meaning little friend, etc.) is a secretary who works in a hotel in New York City. She wrote a great many letters and other missives for me, as well as gave me many good ideas, especially about how to go abroad with regular passports issued by the U. S. Government, instead of the Eureka Novelty Document Company which some of our friends prefer. I did not understand how Dolores, which is the cognomen of my little friend, had acquired all this

explicit know-how, but she said she had once been a private secretary of a ship's purser, twice across and back.

So that is how it was that we were all aboard the *SS Marquise* on our way to a symposium. The *Marquise* is a very exotic ship indeed, and some of the other delegates wished that they could have shared its devastating elegance, but could not do so owing to a large number of people we did not know having acquired tickets ahead of us.

After a certain amount of yacketa yacketa, which my boss's little friend Dolly is rather good at, it was agreed that a symposium could not be a success without a few little friends along to organize a ladies' program. She did not suggest that Dolores should be among those who, and in fact suggested against it. She would not admit it but my little friend Dolores makes her very uncomfortable, being a college type like me. Dolly is not a college type, even though, before she knew my boss, she was elected Miss Off-Campus by a very well known university.

My boss has said I should record certain events which took place on the high seas as part of the minutes of the symposium, so I should start by saying who was on board.

First there was my boss and me. Like I said, he is in the numbers profession exclusively, but he is looking for diversification, which is one of his favorite words. Also Dolly.

There was Manny Cadwader, and everybody knows he is strictly financial, because he got famous a few years ago when he sold a great deal of stock in a Canadian uranium mine which later turned out to have uranium in it. Manny was very shaken up and nervous for awhile, but he is now back in active practice and as good a man as he ever was.

He is a dignified type, like he has to be in his calling, and nobody has ever heard him make reference to any little friends, but he brought along his cousin, Miss Pendergast, and a better stacked cousin I never hope to see. Also with red hair.

Okie Ferris had brought along a young lady of great sultriness, called Naja Divine. She was an orphan girl who he had discovered by the ten dollar window at Pimlice, tearing up some obsolete tickets and plunged into the depths of woe. Okie is a well known sportsman who has had a great influence on the science of racing horses. Mostly, however, he prefers to influence basketball games and similar contests.

Also there was Tony Caro,

the branch bank specialist. He was travelling alone, which was a habit with him, not being much in favor of profit splitting. I have never thought of bank specialists as being very high type characters, but I must admit Tony had brought forth some new angles like, for example, he always opened an account with a bank he was figuring to tap. That way he could get acquainted in a friendly atmosphere and later the bank officers would hardly think that the man with the nylon stocking over his head had been one of their valued clients. Naturally he never tapped so deep that he lost his working capital.

Our cabins were in a row on the top deck which is the right deck to have your rooms on, because Dolores had bought all our tickets at the same time, but with the type passports we were carrying issued by the U. S. Government, all the little friends had to travel by separate names, like their own, and the way the steamship people thought about it, that meant they could not travel with their guardians. So Dolores got a suite for the three of them together, Dolly and Miss Pendergast and Naja.

It was a very exotic suite called the Madame duBarry and it was a good arrangement

indeed, because one and all could use it to give parties and other festivities. We let word leak around the ship that they were three school girls going to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, because there were some people who wondered.

Several of our professional associates who were not going to the symposium had arranged a somewhat gala farewell party for us. Everybody was glad to see us go and we all imbibed a little champagne, a beverage which is widely considered to prevent mal de mer (French for the staggering heaves). In my case it also caused some double vision, so it was the following afternoon before I wished to try to look at anything as complicated as the passenger list.

My boss was having a three o'clock breakfast with the ladies in the duBarry.

"There is a senator on board," I reported, "traveling with a lady who can be no other than his wife because I have just seen her, and the reform mayor of a town in Pennsylvania where we do not do any business but maybe we could if we could catch him at something, and a judge who we are not in the jurisdiction of, and two college professors and a prince. And by the way, I came upon Tony in the purser's

office depositing a bundle of C-notes in the ship safe. I trust he is not planning a tap."

My boss shook his head. "Tony is young at heart and enthusiastic, but a tap on the high seas would be uncouth. A lifeboat is by no means a getaway car. Come back to the prince."

"He is in the Josephine suite. His first name is Muhammed, but he has ten others. He is the ruler of a place called El Jebiza, which I read to you about from Time last month. They had to move the royal palace to make room for more oil wells."

My boss smiled with great cordiality. "We must give a party for the prince. No doubt he is both lonely and timid, so far from his native land. Who else?"

"Horsemeat Mahaffey is aboard."

"The grunter?"

"None other. He is going to England to take a few falls for BBC."

Horsemeat, you know, has gathered a large following among sports devotees because he can look more anguished than anybody when his neck is being twisted.

My boss's eyes, though bloodshot, were trying to sparkle.

"Tonight," he decided, "we shall have a do the like of which

has seldom been done. A friend in the dough is a friend to know. The prince will bewhelmed by our hospitality and the pulchritude of our young companions."

"Watch your language," said Naja.

"Go," said my boss executively.

"Go where?"

"Go invite people. One and all, only high grade, you understand. Only the hoi polloi which would appeal to a Prince in the chips. Tell Manny to get the hell in here forthwith."

Not everybody on the *Marquise* attended our festivity that night, but numerous characters arrived that had not been invited by me. Wives and little friends were mostly missing, not wishing maybe to face the competition of our school girls who had been given a very searching double-O at dinner.

The guest of honor did not show till after midnight. He was a good looking character, not very tall but with a pair of shoulders he must of gotten riding wild Arabian stallions across the desert. Dolly closed in and gave him a belt of lipstick on both cheeks, in a warm but continental manner, and somebody handed him a double shot of Kentucky confidence, and he did not

seem to me either lonely or timid so far from his native land.

I had not invited Horsemear. There are not many grunners addicted to the social graces, and the pride of the Mahaffeys was not among the eliter, but he arrived anyway, and I would not wish to eject a guest who weighs two hundred and eighty pounds, mostly gristle. Horsemear has had his nose pushed around some and talks like a duck with a cold, and right away he got into a discussion with the prince about the grunt and groan profession. The prince by then had forgotten his English and was talking French, and neither could understand a word the other was saying, so they got very excited.

A couple of stewards kept circulating with libations such as booze and, what with one thing and another, it got to be very late indeed before the honored guests began to depart. Miss Pendergast was a very fine bouncer in her own way. She was wearing a simple satin dress covered with fluorescent orange sequins to match her hair. Every so often she would go running out of the suite followed by two or three men because she was always being followed by two or three men. They would rush off through

the corridors, Miss Pendergast glowing in the dark and trailing a scent of fifty dollar an ounce Gimme Gimme. She always lost them and came back alone—a cousin which Manny had the right to be proud of.

Right at the end everybody had gone but the prince and Horsemear and an unconscious Englishman under a sofa, and an argument started. Horsemear swung on the prince and missed. The prince took a fast circuit around the room to gain speed, then charged back with his head down like a bull and butted Horsemear in the middle and Horsemear stepped on the Englishman's hand and fell down. The girls got between them then and they forgot they were fighting, and indeed forgot to say goodnight to their hostesses and went wandering forth in sundry directions, full of confused benevolence.

A couple of stewards who liked ten dollar bills better than they liked their sleep offered to clean up and fill in the biggest bomb craters while the ladies waited in the smoking room, so I retired gladly to my own room, prepared to enjoy some well earned Morpheus.

It was maybe fifteen minutes later when whom should come charging in but Dolly, clad in a black negligee which my boss had bought for her out of an

advertisement in Playboy. I started to shove her out because I know full well which side of my bread cannot be buttered with any degree of safety, when she got through to me that one of the late guests had found his way back to the duBarry, was now recumbent in her bath tub and apparently in an advanced state of decease.

"Who?" I inquired, climbing back into formal evening wear.

"Horsemeat. I did not like his looks when he was alive. You should see him now."

Dolly had a point. He was not anything which a sensitive girl fairly full of bourbon should find in her bath tub. Some way during the evening he had lost his coat and shirt and, as is well known to his TV admirers, he is hairier than a busted mattress. Also he had turned a kind of purple shade since his demise.

"Call Okie Ferris and Tony," I told the ladies. "Three of us can get him back to his cabin. It will be nicest for him to be discovered there."

I did not expect any argument on that, but Okie, it turned out, had some other thoughts.

"I dropped some very good money on the fat slob about a year ago," Okie recounted. "I took his word of honor that he did not have a chance against

the Hoboken Horror and as a matter of fact I paid Horsemeat a small consulting fee for his advice. When, unethically and against all probability, he won the contest, I called to see him to recover the fee. His manager, who is also a slob of sorts, threw me out. What is more, he appeared to enjoy doing so, and what is still more, it got into some newspapers. Thus there are people who might think that I did not love Horsemeat.

Now it is obvious to me that some public spirited citizen has fixed his wagon. Though I am not an expert, it would seem to me from his color, etcetera, that somebody had rammed a sock down his gullet.

"You are my friends," Okie stated further, "and you know that it is not in my character to do such a thing, even to a slob like this, but it would be most embarrassing if the ship doctor or some French gendarme should decide to post a mortem and start asking questions about who might of had a good reason to close his account. I conclude that the only thing to do is throw the SOB overboard. That way there will be no questions, because you know how it is on the high seas. People falling overboard all the time."

I was by no means sure that people fell overboard in large numbers and I thought, that

Okie was making too big a thing of it, but Tony Caro agreed.

"He will make a hell of a splash," Tony pointed out, "but I happen to know where there is a coil of rope on the boat deck because I tripped over it. We will lower him into the water and throw the rope after him."

I do not wish to include any gruesome details in the minutes of the symposium, so I will merely say that to make him inconspicuous the ladies conquered their squeam, put some dark pancake make-up on his face and glued a pink paper hat on his head with the stuff they use to put labels on luggage. It did not quite hide the purple but he looked somewhat more like an exhausted merrymaker and less like a unsuccessful case of embalming.

Dolly was sitting on the edge of the tub in a pose that, except for the negligee and other details, looked like that stature of the Thinker.

"Wait," she admonished. "I have just had an idea."

Dolly is by no means as stupid as, with her looks and figure, she would have every right to be, and we could not but agree that her idea did her much credit, so Miss Pendergast sallied forth and brought back the prince. I would not like to guess what he was expecting,

but it was not the sight of a tub full of Horsemeat. We all looked solemn.

"You butted his too hard," I said. "The poor old man had a weak solar plexus, and after you left he just collapsed and died. In spite of all we could do."

The prince did not understand too well until we had repeated the story in sundry ways, then he shook his head like there was water in his ears.

"This must not be," he stated. "The directors of El Jebiza Petroleum would not like it."

"It is a conservative company?" I inquired.

"Yes, very."

"We must tell somebody," I counselled, "like maybe the captain. He will know about diplomatic immunity and such matters."

"You have not told anybody, then," said the prince, and began to look somewhat more cheerful. "In that case we will just throw him overboard."

"How could you think of such a thing?" Dolly asked.

"It would be illegal," said Okie.

"We would be accessories after the fact," I pointed out.

"He would make a hell of a splash," Tony said.

There was quite a lot of yack, but the prince talked us



into it finally and we got Horsemeat out of the tub and on his way to the boat deck. Okie carried his legs and I and Tony supported the rest of him with his arms across our shoulders. It was not the easiest pall bearing which I have done. The Prince went scouting ahead, which was clearly to the good because he flushed a fat lady in a pink wrapper and with curlers. He grabbed her hand and kissed it and leered with such ardor that she high tailed right back to her cabin, figuring a sex maniac was on the loose because who else would nibble her knuckles?

We found Tony's rope and did up Horsemeat till he looked like a spider's breakfast. It was four AM and still good and dark when Horsemeat slid over the rail and we began to pay him out with the ladies looking over the side to tell us when to let go. They commented that there were big black waves rushing by and before we got him all the way down the tops of the waves were hitting him and making him swing back and forth which we could tell anyway from the feel of the rope.

Suddenly there was a noise which might have been the fog horn only it was not, it was Horsemeat, and Dolly yelled at us to stop paying him out.

"He is not dead after all,"

she stated. "He is looking up and I think that he is trying to tell us something."

It was not easy to pull him up, even with the prince and our little friends leaning onto the rope, and we had not got him very far when he stuck. We pulled as hard as we could without budging him and I had just said to Dolly to look over the rail and see where he was caught, when the rope went slack.

We stood looking at each other and feeling very sorry for poor Horsemeat. He must of struggled till he came loose instead of putting his faith in us.

"He was a nice little man," said the prince, which was not a description anyone would of recognized Horsemeat by, but when you have just dropped somebody into the Atlantic Ocean you do not wish to comment on his faults.

"Throw the rope over," Dolly said, "and come back to the room for a night cap. I feel faint and anyway we should sort of drink a toast to Horsemeat."

After a certain amount of talk and so forth, it was decided that we should not call my boss to apprise him of events. The prince felt that the story should be edited somewhat before publication, and anyway in the

hours before dawn my boss's disposition is uncertain. You cannot be certain if it will be bad or awful. At that hour he would not mind stating pointedly that we had been careless and that any boy scout would know you should try artificial respiration before disposing of the body.

There is nothing like a fatality to sober up a party and we were all in the course of refusing another drink when the door banged open and in walked Horsemeat Mahaffey himself, looking too ugly to be his ghost. He appeared a little shaken up and, in addition to his coat and shirt, he had now lost his shoes, but his color was better than when he had been dead in the bath tub.

"Give me a small drink, somebody," he requested. I am sorry to be dripping on your carpet, but Cripes, you would not believe what just happened to me."

I did not think of anything useful to say, but Miss Pendergast collected herself.

"What happened to you, Horsemeat, darling?" she inquired.

"I fell overboard. I got tangled up in some rope and someway fell overboard. I was all the way in the water, which is why I am dripping on your carpet, when the rope caught

on something and I climbed back up and got in on the bottom deck. Cripes, was I tangled."

"There is some champagne in my room," said the prince. "I will get a bottle and you shall have it all, Horsemeat, old man."

"No," said Horsemeat. "I do not care for ticklish drinks. Anyway I do not ever drink very much or I become unconscious. Please do not relate this in public, since it would hurt my image with my many fans. I would, however, take a small one on account of the ocean was very cold."

"What became of your shoes?" Dolly queried, pouring what she considered a small one.

Horsemeat looked modest. "A shark got them. I do not wish to talk about it."

"Horsemeat," the Prince stated, "you are a brave man. We need men like you in El Jebiza. How would you like to be an honorary Wazir? No? Or a vice president of the National

Bank. Yes? As good as done."

At breakfast the next afternoon I recounted to my boss all that had transpired. The other delegates had wandered in one by one to partake of aspirins and black coffee and add well intentioned interruptions to my report. My boss looked thoughtful.

"Vice President of the National Bank. The Prince cannot be as smart as he looks. I suspect that Horsemeat cannot always make his fingers add up to ten. Those poor people may soon be in deep trouble. Manny, are you thinking?"

Manny nodded. He never says much unless he is selling you something.

"The symposium must go on," said my boss. "Thereafter we will go to—where is it?—and do those poor people good."

That is the end of the minutes of the events on the high seas, and on Wednesday we will be in Paris pour some travail serieux. (French, meaning hard work).

It's next month:

Another TRUE CRIME STORY Masterpiece

WALTER "THE WAITER" RICCA

by DAVID MAZROFF

THE SENSUOUS CORPSE

She had no morals, no scruples, no heart, that girl of mine. Now, after that shotgun blast, she had no head. She'd been everything that was bad for me, I knew. But love does funny things to a guy. Her killer must die!

by JACK WEBB

NANCY GREER was dead. There wasn't enough left of her head for all the king's horses and all the king's men. Somebody, maybe Nancy, had put a shotgun in her mouth and pulled the trigger.

Love dies hard. Particularly, when it looks like this.

Lieutenant Sevitz said, "I understand you and Miss Greer were engaged in what might be called an intimate relationship."

I said nothing.

"Some of the neighbors," he added drily, "know you both rather well."

"That was finished last night," I told him. It was now five o'clock the following morning.

"So I understand," Sevitz admitted.

They had drawn the chalk line about what was left. I wished to hell the basket boys would come.

"The argument," Sevitz continued, "was apparent."

"Probably," I admitted, "for about half a block."

"She was cheating on you?"

"On herself!" It came out more explosive than I had meant.

"A curious remark," the lieutenant said helpfully.

"Nancy," I said softly, "was a curious girl. You know what she did for a living."

"About that argument," Sevitz said.

A STORY OF A MAN'S STRANGE VENGEANCE QUEST



I shoved my hands in my pockets, found cigarettes.

"It doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference now," I told him. "She'd picked up a private stag party job. Called for a partner, male. I blew my top."

Sevitz waited.

"We yelled at each other," I said helplessly. "We threw some things around, not each other. I left mad. But I didn't come back. I don't own a shotgun. Neither does, did, Nancy!"

"What time was that?"

"About eight-thirty. Her party date was ten."

"And that was that?"

"Not quite," I admitted.

"On the way out, I opened up her bug in the carport and pulled the battery connectors. I took them with me!"

The lieutenant came as near to a grin as he ever permitted.

"We can put you in jail for that," he said.

"Why not?" I got a cigarette, my mouth and a lighter all within reasonable relationship.

Sevitz turned on his heel and went down the hall, past the living room and into Nancy's bedroom. When I didn't start to follow, he beckoned with a thumb. In the bedroom, he closed the door.

"Sit down," he said to me.

I did, staring around the shambles of a well-remembered room.

When he could stare down at me, he said, "You've had a private license in this town for six or seven years. As far as I know, you've played it reasonably straight with the Department. You also did me a favor on the Lingstrom case, even when I was biting your nose. If I pull you in and charge you, you're dead. At the most, you've got twenty-four hours. If something doesn't turn up in that time, you're the patsy. You're number one. You read me, Jake?"

I told him I did.

"Now get the hell out of here," he snapped, "before I change my mind. Although how in hell you let yourself get mixed up with a bottomless dancer—" His remark trailed off.

"It was something more than that," I said.

"Beat it," Sevitz said.

I did.

It was five-thirty in the morning. The sun was coming up and a hot wind was blowing. A Santa Ana wind was hitting Los Angeles so there would be no smog. Otherwise, it would be a hell of a day. Otherwise, it already was.

I had not driven to Nancy's place this time. Sevitz had sent a car for me. We both had forgotten that. I started walking, down the hill to Sunset.

Down there, I could pick up a cab. There really wasn't much else I could do this time in the morning about Nancy, about me, about anything.

I thought about her agent. On a single shot deal like last night's, Nancy and her partner would get a hundred apiece and Dobb Bowman would pick up another fifty off the top. Nancy had been working for Bowman for about two years. For a year and a half of that, she had been making close to four hundred a week. A reasonably profitable item for Dobb Bowman.

Still, my lousing up of last night's contract really didn't amount to anything beyond me getting the shove from Nancy. Not unless a hundred bucks meant a hell of a lot to her partner. If he were a high-H boy, that might be meaningful. As for Bowman, the contract wouldn't mean that much, not compared to his standard percentage, not unless—I paused and gave it some careful consideration. But you couldn't tie the syndicate into this one. not when they had a piece of most of the action anywhere. Hell, they had girls as available as rental trailers. They wouldn't use Bowman.

How do I love thee? Shove it! I said as I went down the hill.

The cab home cost me seven

bucks. I wondered if I could bill the Department for inconvenience to a citizen. I doubted it. According to L.A.P.D. private investigators are on the fringe of civilized society, the outer fringe.

At the apartment, I shucked shoes, coat and tie and threw me on my bed. It wasn't so much a throw as a drop. But I went down there to die, and just before I did, I set the alarm for nine. Nobody I had to talk to would be available before ten.

I slept a dreamless sleep. Came out of it with the clock radio shouting, "*Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ!*" It was from one of those records of *Super Star*.

I carried the refrain into the bathroom and went under the shower.

Shaved and teeth brushed, I felt a little more human. Bowman had an office in Santa Monica. It was called *Talents Preferred*. On the way down there, I stopped for breakfast. I had fruit juice, a steak and toast. It might be a long time before I had a chance to eat again. There was also a chance there might be action. Whatever the reason for Nancy's death, it wouldn't be solved on a chessboard. I was carrying a Colt .38 automatic set on a .32 frame. So far as I know you

can't buy one anymore. The gun was fifty years old. It had been my father's. He had loved it and cared for it accordingly. It was a lovely gun with a very fast action. Unlike the newer magnums, it couldn't break an engine block at fifty yards. It could, however, kill people. Occasionally it had.

Thinking about that, I thought about my father. He had died in 'sixty after forty years with the Los Angeles County Sheriff. He had been lucky. In his day, there were no grey areas. It was all so easy. You were within the law or you were outside. That was the only difference. He never would have forgiven me for Nancy.

Santa Monica remains a handsome town. A good share of its beachside ricky-tick has been burned down. There are any number of fine new buildings, residential areas, apartments and the like sprawling about. But the old town remains. And in one of its shabbier three-story antiques is the office of *Talents Preferred*.

Ostensibly, it is a legitimate and respectable business. It gets jobs for girls who dance. Originally, it also had handled pianists, vocalists and small combos for bars and restaurants.

Very few of these remained. They had started dropping off

with the advent of the topless-bottomless juke box era. I really did know quite a bit about the Dobb Bowman enterprise. It wasn't long after I met Nancy that I started looking it up. You could call it a hobby.

I took the elevator to the third floor. The typist-receptionist-girl-Friday looked like Nefertiti with a hangover. A half-dozen girls sat on imitation Eames chairs distributed along two of the panel-board walls. I wondered how many of them were voting age, although that had been lowered recently.

The fading queen smiled automatically. "May I help you, sir?"

"You bet," I told her.

I did my thing, went past her, and pushed through the door into the big office. The redhead standing before the desk didn't have time to do anything about her unbuttoned blouse, but she did drop what little she had of a skirt.

"What the hell!" Bowman began.

"Nancy Greer is dead," I told him. "Somebody blew the top of her head off last night. You'll be hearing from the police shortly. Now, you and I are going to have a chat."

The redhead pulled up her pantyhose and departed, clutching her blouse together.

"Who in hell are you?" Bowman demanded. His hand slid down toward a desk drawer.

"Leave it alone," I told him.

Dobb Bowman looked ordinary enough to be vice president of your local PTA. Even the fact I had caught him with a girl that way was no more than what I would have encountered had I interrupted any other private business session. Not until I opened the drawer he had been reaching for.

The gun in there was a lot larger than mine. But not half as nice. I let the clip of cartridges drop out of the butt and then jacked the single from the chamber. I gave him back his gun.

"That could get you in trouble," I told him. "Also, because it was made by a typewriter company during World War II, it pulls high. That means you'd be very unlikely to hit me where you aimed. Now, let's talk about Nancy."

"She's dead," Bowman said. "That's what you said."

"Also last night, she was going to a stag party with a male partner. I want to know who the partner was and who's party."

"And just who the hell are you?" Bowman repeated.

"A friend of the deceased," I



told him. "The law isn't going to be one half as nice as I am."

"Also," I added conversationally, "because I must cooperate with the law after they reach you, I might mention Jenny Barton, Grace Zorro and Fran Gomez. All under age, all booked into clubs by you until Papa Gomez threatened to kill you and you looked a little deeper into your whole stable. It'll be real easy to get back to Papa Gomez."

Now Bowman didn't look so

much like the vice president of a PTA.

The door behind me opened. It was the tarnished goddess. "Everything all right, Mr. Bowman?"

"Fine, Sandra." Dobb Bowman managed. "Just leave us alone, please. No, wait a moment. The young man's name who was to go to the Harmon party with Miss Greer."

"That would be Jon Hastings," Sandra said.

"Address." I said.

Sandra looked at Bowman.

"Address," Bowman confirmed.

"Also Harmon's," I added.

Both of them were startled.

It hit me like Deacon Jones reading my play. So I passed to both receivers.

"Billy Harmon's address and unlisted number," I attached to my request.

Billy Harmon! *The Bill Harmon of Tonight's The Night Show!* Channel 14's answer to the big guns on after ten programming. The talk show that "looked behind the scenes."

Dobb Bowman and Sandra engaged in an eyeball to eyeball exchange. I interrupted. "If that was to call the police, I don't mind. All I have to do is get the cops to check with L.A.P.D., Homicide. Sevitz will

tell them he knows I'm prying. But just in case you're playing fancy, let's all go out with Miss Sandra and confirm those addresses and phone numbers.

Sandra stared at the empty gun on Dobb's desk. I motioned him to come around it. We paraded out of the private office in single file. I brought up the rear. There was enough unusual in our appearance that a number of the girls, sitting in the Eams chairs made an effort to cover up.

Jon Hastings was in her tickler file. "711 Point View Drive." Sandra had just started to write it when the door from the stairs flew open and an ugly little man stood there with his legs spread apart. I went down behind the desk, pulling Sandra with me. Dobb Bowman wasn't so fast. The little man shot him three times before I had the .38 out.

I shot from under the furniture, sprinkling half a dozen shots between his spraddled legs. He put a few at me through the front of the desk. I saw a leg jerk before he spun and went down the stairs.

The long-legged, big-breasted, long-haired girls were doing all sorts of things, including screaming. I stood up and shouted, "Shut up!" Maybe I gestured with the gun. Most of them subsided.

Dobb Bowman was pretty much of a mess. Also he was dead. Nor was Sandra getting up. She was holding tight, down around her appendix and her eyes were glazed.

I picked up the phone and dialed zero. Operator answered.

"Get me the police department," I told her.

A crisp voice told me I had it.

"Talents Preferred," I said. "Third floor, Argus Building. Bowman's dead. His secretary's shot. Get an ambulance there fast. Also put an all points out on Benny Levine. He had the contract.

"And who—" the crisp voice began.

I hung up the phone and went down the stairs even faster than Benny had. There was very solid evidence that one of my shots had not gone wild. It dripped all the way out to the curb, even across the white-painted area of the passenger-curb.

I found my car and moved. I was turning into a supermarket parking lot when I heard the sirens. My Nancy had become big league now. Little Benny proved that. Generally, he worked out of Vegas. Generally, there was excellent evidence he never left home. The tip I had given the local constabulary should shake his employers.

The point was that I would have to do whatever I could do before they shook Benny. The Great American Desert hides a hell of a lot of things, not counting its natural wonders.

I used my *Thomas* maps to locate 711 Point View Drive. It was on the edge of Santa Monica in the never-never land before you reach Pacific Palisades. Before I left the parking lot, I found a phone and called the L.A.P.D. I left a message for Lieutenant Sevitz.

"Tell him," I said, "Dobb Bowman is dead. Tell him it was Benny Levine whodunit. Tell him Levine is wounded, calf or ankle."

I hung up the phone and got out. Sevitz was such a good friend of mine he even had let me loose. But I didn't hang easy on that one. Bait often gets swallowed by the larger fish.

I headed out toward Point View Drive. Seven-eleven was a dump. Pink stucco and tile, a long, narrow center court, half a centry old or more. The stucco was leprous. Shucking coat, shirt and tie, I put a fresh clip in the flat .38 and slid it into a hip pocket. I pulled out the skirt of my T-shirt and let it drape loosely.

I went up the walk between the ragged junipers and pyrocantha, looking at the name plates, rusty rectangles of brass,

most with nothing in them or blue ink so faded they appeared to have been written invisibly. His name was there, though, in pencil. All kinds of actors have a kind of ego.

I pressed the bell, heard nothing, knocked.

The buffalo who answered the door said, "Get lost."

"I came from Bowman."

"So what?"

"I'm to see Hastings."

He opened the screen door and we went in. He closed both the screen and the solid door behind us. There was an orgy going on in the living room. It was all under cameras and lights. The animal smell was only a little more offensive than a stock yard.

The scene broke finally. Somebody handed the two girls cokes. The bright lights went off. Jon Hastings got up, using a terry towel. One of the men who had been working close with a hand-grip camera came over to buffalo-head. He was a lean, pale animal with a Cervantes face and beard. "Who's the character?"

Buffalo-head said, "Bowman sent him. He wants to see Jon."

Cervantes regarded me professionally. He undressed me like I might regard a girl on a shopping mall. "You ever done any of this?"

"Not professionally," I told

him. "I'm here to see Hastings."

"Too bad," Cervantes said. "What if we leave the head out?"

"Hastings," I repeated.

Cervantes shrugged. "Why not?"

Buffalo-head called, "Jon."

The beautiful young man came over. He was not using his towel as a modesty garment.

Buffalo-head said, "Bowman sent this character to see you."

Cervantes had lost interest. He wandered over to the two girls who were drinking their soft drinks as unconcernedly as a couple of teenagers at a drive-in.

Hastings regarded me curiously. "If it's for tonight, no dice."

"It ain't," I said. "If you'll put on a pair of pants, I'd like to talk to you privately."

Hastings shrugged.

"Put on your god damned pants," I said.

Jon measured me. But I guess it was my connection with Bowman that won. He put on his pants and we went into the bathroom. He said, "With all these broads and grips wandering around, this has to be the place."

I put down the seat cover on the john and sat. He sat on the edge of the old fashion tub.

"Okay," he said, "What'd Dobbys want?"

"Dobbsy," I said carefully, "doesn't want anything. About an hour ago, he was killed by Benny Levine. Benny, you may know, is a contract man out of Vegas. Harry Johnston gives him board and room. Last night, somebody blew the top off Nancy Greer's head through the roof of her mouth. She was suppose to go out on a date with you."

"You want to talk about it?"

Hastings stood up. "I know you now. You're the two-bit private dick who was her boy friend."

I hit him in his nice hard belly. It didn't hurt him much, but it knocked him backward into the tub. He clawed at getting out. I pushed him in the face. He slipped and slithered on the slippery sides of the tub. I got my gun out and stood over him, holding it by the muzzle.

He stared at me with pure hatred.

"You and Nancy," I said, "were going to entertain a party at Billy Harmon's place. Want to tell me about it?"

Hastings told me what I could do with myself.

"Nancy never got there."

"The hell you say!"

I slapped Jon on the side of his face with the gun. Not enough to do any harm. But the

color in a day or two would be highly photogenic.

"You tell me about last night," I said, "beginning about six, on until midnight."

He lay in the tub quietly, his arms along the porcelined top of the two sides. "We worked here until seven-thirty," he said. "A lot of these twists, like those two out there, they do okay, but not like Nancy. To them, it's just a job. Nancy enjoyed it."

That did a lot for the mourning I was doing for my own true love. I had enjoyed hitting the sonofabitch. Now, it would be a pleasure to kill him.

"You're lying," I told him.

Jon Hastings grinned. "You're a sucker, friend."

He never knew how close he came to dying. Maybe, he would have if he hadn't shot his right arm away from the tub and grabbed my leg. I chopped his elbow with the butt of the gun. He was crying softly with pain. I was crying inside for Nancy and me.

Finally, I said, "Let's get on with the evening."

He lay in the tub, rubbing his elbow. "I went to pick her up about quarter to nine. The door was unlocked. I pulled it open and said it was me. She came to the bedroom door, right there at the edge of the hall and said, 'Fix yourself a

drink, Jon. I'll be with you in a minute.'

"I did just what she said. Went to her kitchen and put a couple of ounces in a glass. That would carry me good. No more until after the show. Your friend Billy would pick up the tab from there on."

I had not been ignorant of Nancy's occupation. Hell, I had met her at one of those show-and-tease emporiums, the most sexually exciting woman I ever would see, know, love. Intellectual, too. That was the prize in the *Cracker Jack* box. She had been within sixteen units of her degree, working her shows with Dobb Bowman around her schedule at U.C.L.A.. Not carrying a full course, but working out the units, piece by piece, over seven years.

"Go on," I said to Hastings.

"She had a phone call," Jon told me. "There was a phone in the kitchen, but she took it in the bedroom."

"And you listened."

"Sure," Hastings said.

"Go on."

"She was cheating on Fugal."

"Fugal?"

Hastings jerked a thumb toward the door. "The character with the scrawny beard out there. Generally we work with him. Apparently Nance was

being offered five-grand to move over to *Chanticleer Productions*. They wanted her for the lead in a skin flick called *Lady Finger's Love*. She accepted.

"And then?"

Hastings grinned at me without humor. "We went out to Harmon's."

"What time did you get her back to her apartment?"

"About three."

"And that was that?" I was nearer dead than I ever had been. Physically, mentally, maybe even spiritually. Hastings was a bastard, but I had the feeling he was a honest one. Nancy, for all she had given me, was something else. Beyond using her body to buy an education there was something else. Greed? A lousy word, not enough.

Hastings said finally, "You really want her killer." And then, more to the point, "What you said about this Benny Levine, that was on the level?"

"You better believe it."

"Billy Harmon took pictures of his parties," Hastings said. "I found that out by accident. Peephole in an oil painting. I saw the light of a cigarette lighter shine on the lens one night. Closet behind the picture. I told your girl friend about it. This was maybe a month ago."

"About last night," I began.

Only then there was a commotion outside. Like somebody coming through the front door and a voice saying, "Which one of you is Harmon?"

"Lie down in the tub," I snapped.

I pulled the shower curtain and then spraddled the toilet so the door couldn't open against me. I jacked a cartridge into the chamber.

Somebody must have told the voice that there were two of us in the bathroom, because all of a sudden there were bullets. They carved a fan in the door. It was a perfect spray pattern except for two facts. It couldn't go through a bathtub and it didn't know about the alcove wherein I stood.

After a long minute, probably about twenty seconds, he kicked open the door for a look inside. I shot him through the right shoulder. When he spun, I put a second shot in the back of his left kneecap. My father's gun was a lovely gun. With a little practice, you could shoot flies. I had.

"Okay," I said to our skin-flick hero, "you can get up now."

The group outside looked like a posed portrait of London during the plague, complete with nude females prostrate on the floor.

"You can all put on your clothes." I told them, "Is there a phone in this flea bag?"

Buffalo-head pointed.

Contractor two was trying to reach his gun with his left hand. I kicked it out of his way. I picked up the phone and dialed operator. I gave her the L.A.P.D. number. She started to tell me how to dial it. I told her I was blind and would she please do it for me.

The switchboard there gave me Sevitz' extension.

Sevitz demanded, "What in hell do you do in Santa Monica? You're in trouble there, Jake. For God's sake turn yourself in. I'll stand behind you on that Levine thing. Apparently there were a hell of a lot of screaming witnesses. Even his secretary says you saved her life—if you did."

"Bad?"

"Very bad. Come on back and talk, Jake. That's more than a suggestion."

"Sorry," I told him. "I just shot up another pro. Not fatal. Right shoulder and left leg. He can't shoot and he can't walk. Get your friends in Santa Monica out here fast. It's a nudie scene but they don't know what happened or why. And I am beginning to think I do."

"Jake!" Sevitz yelled.

"Seven-eleven Point View

Drive." I told him. Then, I cradled the phone.

"The police will be here any minute," I told the group. "If you're smart, you'll stick it out. If you want to admit why you're all alive, you'll describe me very carefully. After he got Jon, your friend," I pointed to the man on the floor, "couldn't have afforded to leave any witnesses."

Hastings was holding onto both sides of the door from the bathroom. He said to me, "Can I be of any use? I heard your phone call."

"Sure," I said. "Get a shirt and some shoes. Put them on in the car."

I was just starting the engine when he slipped in beside me.

He had moccasins on his feet and was pulling a double-knit shirt over his head.

"You just saved my life," he said. "That's something to think about."

"Not as much as what's scaring me," I told him.

"What do you mean by that?" Jon demanded.

"My list of priority," I told him. "Somebody's trying to wipe out everything that happened last night, early this morning. Where do you suppose Billy Harmon stood on the list? Nancy's dead. Who was she with last night?"

"Hy Lochman," Jon Hastings said.

"Who in hell is Hy Lochman?" I demanded.

"Jesus Lamb, Hurry My Lord To Me, Galilee Clambake."

"Good Lord!" I said. I could see his picture damned near everywhere.

"With a dollar sign, amen," Hastings said.

"That freak couldn't hire contract killers."

"That boy was dollars, man. Somebody had to protect that bread. That's a living gold mine."

"Who?"

We drove down the street. I took us off Point View Drive with a couple of quick corners, pulled into a taco joint when I heard the sirens coming. I swung out of the car. "Coke or coffee?"

"Coke," Jon said.

I got us a couple and came back to the car. I wondered if Sevitz of the DMV had given the local group a description of my car and the license number.

"Lochman," I said, "who's handling the dough?"

Jon named an agency.

"I don't mean that. Who bankrolled him into the top spot with the Jesus freaks and those with the money to buy his records and tapes?"

Hastings moved uneasily.

"Vegas, I hear."

I leaned over him. I hoped I stunk of the fear I had felt in that little bathroom, waiting it out.

"Except for me," I said, "You'd be dead. Let's have it, or I'll throw you away. You're half dead already. Somebody else has moved in, you can bet on that. I've got them worried, but I haven't got them licked. Not if what you've told me is true, Lochman is big money, they'll still keep coming."

I paused, startled. "You, Nancy, Bowman, you're none of you that important unless Nancy had her hands on something."

"My God!" Hastings said.

"I'm way ahead of you," I told him. "Nancy got the film. It wasn't at her apartment. At least it wasn't at her apartment after she was killed. And, if they had found it, they wouldn't have come after Bowman and you. They don't kill for fun, or to attract attention. You picked her up?"

Hastings nodded.

"Granting you didn't wear costumes for your act, did Nancy carry anything with her?"

"Sure," he said, "her wig case."

I stared at him, astonished. "Wig case?"

"It depended on the act,"



Hastings said professionally. "Long blonde tresses, virgin being raped; redhead, tigeress in charge; black, black magic. She could judge an audience real good."

"Wig box," I said. "She took it home with her?"

"She came out with it," Jon said. "I remember her handing it to me when she kissed Billy good night. She always did that."

I wondered if I ever could repay him for all the stages he had gone through in making me sick. Physically sick. There's an order in my church called the Redemptionists, they dwell on the physical existence of hell. I wondered what they could have done to improve on what Jon Hastings, hero of the skin flicks, was doing to me!

I said carefully, "And when you let her out at her apartment, she carried the wig box in with her?"

Hastings started to agree. Then, he paused.

"After she got out of the car," he said, "she kissed me too. Both hands holding my chin, there at the car window. Both hands," he repeated. "Didn't set anything down. Didn't pick anything up." He was genuinely startled.

"Did you stop anywhere on the way home?"

"She didn't want to," Hastings said. "I remember I asked."

"But she left her wig box in your car?"

"Must be." He stared at me worried.

"Where's that?"

"Around the corner on Palm, half a block up. Private garage in a little house. People retired. They don't have a car. Nice folks. I pay 'em twenty a month."

I was frightened some more, not for Jon, for those *nice folks*. "How many of your crew today know where you parked your car?"

He shook his head, "Those pigs, nobody. Fugal offered me a hundred bucks a day for the use of my apartment. We're not even pen pals."

"We've got to get back on your car," I said.

Hastings said, "You mean that sonofabitch when I was in the bathtub?"

"He was only number two," I told him. "Before that, I incompetated number one. You see how fast they work?"

Jon Hastings swore.

"So, how do we get back to your beast without being seen?" I could bet that any kid on the block would know where Hastings parked his car. Porsche or Jaguar, I didn't want to ask.

Hastings said thoughtfully, "If we go down Vinson and park there, we can cut down the drive opposite and go over a five-foot fence."

"How do we get to Vinson?"

Jon told me.

I turned the proper corners. My friend was getting nervous.

"What'll you do with the films?"

"L.A.P.D." I told him. "Sevitz has squared with me. I'll square with him."

"What good will that do?"

"Help nail the son of a bitch who killed Nancy."

"A hired hand. What difference will that make?"

"I'm not talking about the son of a bitch who pulled the trigger. I may have gotten him already. I'm talking about *Number One*."

"I'm probably in that film," Hastings said uncomfortably.

"That has nothing to do with murder."

"There are a hell of a lot of peculiar things illegal in this state," Hastings said. "Particularly concerning the way you make love!"

"I don't think they'll be thinking about that," I said.

What happened next, happened so fast, I'm not sure of the order. Hastings either slammed me in the side of the head and then twisted the key out of the ignition and threw it from the car, or, *vice-versa*. When the circles of pain slowed enough, I could see Hastings running down a street my car was dead in the middle of.

When you're been beat up as often as I have, there are still things you can do while gathering pieces. It's a part of survival, an important part.

I shoved the shift into neutral, stumbled out of the car and with one hand on the wheel, pushed the car into the curb. And then, I made myself go back and look for the keys. Fortunately, they had been caught in the elbow of the curb.

I could not run after Hastings, I walked. I did not walk drunkenly. I walked like a drunk determined to do the straight line. The colors of the hot, grey morning were much

more vivid than that. I saw each house I passed very clearly. I remember a purple geranium blooming beside an old-fashioned porch. I remember thinking that I did not believe there could be purple geraniums. It was something I would have to work on later.

Then, because there was a drive that went along beside a frame house where a dog was barking, I paused. Beside the garage was a five-foot fence. I went down the drive. The dog began to go crazy.

A woman came to the back door and said, "Just where are you going, mister?"

"Over that fence," I told her. "I think somebody else just did."

"You a cop or something?"

"Mostly something," I told her. I kept on walking. Finally, she yelled at the dog.

I went over the fence and held on to the other side. I had underestimated Jon Hastings. His right had packed a pro-punch.

I was beside another garage where there was a clothesline and a vegetable garden. Then, because I heard something going on, I got out my gun.

It was going on all right. Hastings and a wig case came out of the garage. They were followed by a tall, blond, hard-looking character with his

right hand in the pocket of a corduroy jacket. I didn't pause for any of the social amenities. As I had with his predecessor, I shot him through the right shoulder. I wasn't leaving any bodies, but I was sure making a lot of problems for the Santa Monica police. I hoped Sevit's relationships were good.

Hastings swung like a skittering rabbit.

"You better drop that case," I told him, "it's getting harder to tell the good guys from the bad."

He did.

Before I could go along to pick it up, somebody out at the entrance started putting on a show of his own. Bullets were going all over the neighborhood. One of them hit Jon. The blond tough I had shot was running toward the car. I crouched and rested both elbows hard against my thighs. Holding the automatic with both hands, I emptied what was left into the car. They stopped things there, but not in the neighborhood.

A lot of damned fools were pouring outside. Some, less foolish, were undoubtedly calling the police.

I took the wig case in a rush and then went back over the fence, reversing the way I had come.

The dog went crazy some

more. The woman came out on the back porch and watched me run out from alongside the garage. She was a heavysset, good looking woman with astonishing red hair.

"Sorry to be such a nuisance," I told her.

I kept on running. When I reached my car, I put it in a U-turn and then took every corner I came to. Eventually, I hit a freeway entrance. If I had any sense I'd keep right on going until I hit the street that divides city hall from the police building.

I didn't. Instead, I swung north toward Beverly Hills, making just one stop. The Beverly Hills post office lent me enough paper to make the wig case a legal first class, registered letter. It cost me \$28.00 to mail it to Lieutenant Sevit.

The next problem was Bill Harmon. Unlisted phone in an unlisted town, a highly uncooperative, protective unlisted town. Dobb Bowman who was going to look it up, couldn't, not unless it was very long distance. Sevit was waiting to wring my neck. I remembered Chuck Bochman. Before I left the post office, I found the phone book and looked up Bochman, Inc. I had saved him two expensive divorces.

The girl at the phone was hesitant. I told her to get me off

the switchboard or I'd sear her manicure. The secretary was cool beyond belief. She could have played goalie for the *Kings*. I told her to get me through to Charles Algernon Bochman or I'd set fire to her hot pants. We managed to let her know my name.

Chuck said earnestly, "I've been meaning to call you, Jake. Miriam simply doesn't understand me anymore. As a matter of fact, I hear she's taken up with a disc jockey, a rock-and-roll disc jockey, can you believe that?"

"Not only can I believe it," I told Chuck, "I'll get you enough evidence for no alimony at all if you'll get me Billy Harmon's Beverly Hills address. Like right now, in about one hundred twenty seconds."

Chuck hesitated. I was climbing Olympus. "Can I call you back?"

"Two minutes while I hang on, or I go to work for Miriam."

"You scare me," Chuck said, not at all lightly.

"I mean to," I told him. "So far today, I've shot three men."

"You're kidding."

"No," I said.

One good thing about Chuck Bochman, he believed me. "Address I don't know. I've been there to a couple of

parties." He told me how to get there.

"Another thing," I told him. "Don't call Billy and tell him I'm coming. This thing is out of Vegas. I've been working versus contract help. I've made so damned many things go wrong, Billy could be next on the list."

Bochman didn't say anything.

"You hear me?"

"I hear you." I had a feeling he hung up the phone limply. Chuck Bochman was very near the big time. He had got there on service, not on nerve.

When I left the post office, there was a black and white police car in the parking lot. I walked on down the street in Beverly Hills until I found a taxi. I asked the cabby to take me to the nearest car rental agency.

I rented a Jag. It was brilliant red, not much more graceful than a dolphin and purred like a contented lion. It was a shame to waste it in traffic. After we got out of the crowd, I remembered the clip in my gun was empty and that the spares were locked in the glove compartment of my own car. We went back to town and found a sporting goods store. I bought a box of shells. With the cost of bullets, cartridges and powder what they were, it scarcely paid to kill people.

Finally, I found the top of the proper hill. The Jaguar didn't intimidate the guard at the gate at all. After I had given my name, he told me politely enough, "We weren't expecting you, Mr. Jacobson."

I said, "Could you call Mr. Harmon, or whoever receives his calls, and tell him that Miss Nancy Greer is dead, murdered; that Mr. Dobb Bowman is dead, murdered, that Mr. Bowman's secretary has been shot and wounded; that Mr. Jon Hastings, who entertained Mr. Harmon and his friends last evening has been shot and wounded; that I suspect some rather extraordinary film was stolen from Mr. Harmon's hacienda last night; and that I, myself, have come off somewhat better than might be expected while tangling with three Las Vegas types. The only Vegas-type I've made a positive identification on is Benny Levine.

"Generally, he works for Harry Johnston. So, after you've told him all that, could you tell him, I think it's time we had a talk."

Finishing these ruffles and flourishes, I handed the sun-burnt young man my card. And it's here I think my fire engine paid off. He didn't tell me I was a half-baked private eye. He went and made the phone call,

then opened the gate and I drove into it.

And, I mean *into it!*

I never had met any of the crowd personally, but I certainly did know Billy Harmon of *Tonight's The Night*, Hy Lochman, who had parlayed a beaten whine of Gospel rock into about a million bucks, and Harry Johnston, lately of Las Vegas.

They made a grand group. And they weren't depending on the three-to-one odds to take care of me. They had the kind of support with them in that big room that made me realize I hadn't even taken care of the skirmishers.

Johnston was the spokesman.

"We want the film," he said.

"Sorry," I said, "I don't have it."

"You got it from a punk named Hastings," Johnston said. He really looked like a banker saying I had a nerve to ask for a loan.

I said, "I took the wig case he was carrying after one of your boys shot him. I didn't look inside."

"And just where is that wig case, Mr. Jacobs?"

"On the way to Lieutenant Sevitz," I told him. "L.A.P.D. Homicide. You see, my girl was killed, Mr. Johnson, sir."

It was going to come before

I was ready and there wasn't one damn thing I could do about it.

"That—" Hy Lochman started to say.

Hardly a proper word for a singing preacher man. So, I sort of wandered across the floor and hit him in the belly.

It was wonderfully satisfying. It was the kind of punch that gave him the floor, quite a good deal of it by the time he lost his breakfast liquor.

Only then I was in serious trouble.

About the last thing I heard was Harry Johnston, telling them to cool it. They were making a shambles of me. So, I rode with the pain and went down to nothing. I let the nothing go on as long as it could.

Facing slapping is hard to sleep with.

I looked up at Johnston. Harmon was peering over his shoulder.

"The film," Johnston said.

"On its way to Homicide," I told him. "I attached my card."

"Oh, my God!" Harmon said.

"Pick him up," Johnston said to his trained apes.

They picked me up. I let them do all the supporting. I took all the rest I could get. The flat gun was still in my hip pocket.

"Told him I was coming here," I mumbled.

"You what?" Harmon demanded.

"Told him I was coming here," I repeated.

"Oh, my God!" Harmon repeated. He didn't look much more like the blithe spirit on his evening show than I did.

Even Johnston was off base and out of step. I wished I could think of something to do about it.

"You got it about two hours ago," Johnston said finally. "You drove from Santa Monica, here. Two questions become apparent. How did you send it to Los Angeles Homicide, and after you sent it, why did you come here?"

I decided to play it honest. I still let the two primates hold onto my arms.

"In reverse order," I told Johnston, "I came here because I figured Harmon had to be next on your list. Nancy was dead. Bowman was dead. You made a try for Hastings and missed because of me. I didn't know how fast you'd catch on to that, so I came up to warn Harmon. I didn't realize he'd be on your string."

"How did you send the film?" Johnston repeated. His plump face was tight now, nervous.

"Uncle Sam," I told him.

"Registered, special delivery. Expensive, but safe."

At the same time I finished my statement, I pulled a trick as old as sin. I brought my heels down hard on two insteps and at the same time, rolled forward.

When I came to my feet, I was behind Johnston. My lovely gift from my father was hard in Johnston's back. I moved us so none of his friends were behind us, only an open French door, leading to the terrace.

I said, quite casually, "The trigger pull is less than two ounces. Even if you shoot me, the chances are about twenty to one that the boss will be dead quite as quickly as I." I was delighted that they had found me clean because nobody but a fool carried his gun in his hip pocket.

Our TV night show was seeing its own ghost. Rock gospel was still too sick to care. I wished to hell I could have just one more bright idea.

"Nancy Greer is dead," I said. "That's the whole reason I'm here. You arranged it, Harry." I nudged Johnston with the muzzle of the flat .38. "But you tell me who put the shotgun in her mouth and pulled the trigger, and I may let you live."

"You're a stupid ass," Johnston said.

I moved the gun away from his spinal column and pulled off a shot across the cage of his ribs. If I hadn't grabbed his coat collar, he would have fallen with the shock and the pain. I looked across him to a whole lot of guns.

"Drop them on the floor," I snapped, "or I'll do it again." I held onto Harry's collar.

"Drop them." Harry said.

They dropped.

His two boys left something to be desired. If you had run into Harmon or Lochman at that moment in your garden, you would have squashed them under your heel. His apes were only reacting to conditioned training. They had let the boss be in danger. They had let the boss get shot. Their own futures were considerably less than secure. They were still highly dangerous. But for the moment, I was in charge.

The fact I had fired the gun was something else again. I remembered the clean cut, hard young man at the gate. He was another kind of protection.

"Nancy," I said. "You gave the orders, but who picked up the contract?"

I moved the muzzle of the gun toward the edge of his flesh wound which had to be burning like hell. *My beloved is mine, Nancy had said, and I am his. He feedeth among the lilies.*

"Nancy," I repeated.

Harry Johnston said nothing.

"Levine," one of Harry's defrocked gunmen said.

I suspected he was telling the truth. I suspected he was trying to make points for letting me go. I suspected he had just cancelled his own check for good.

Before he became aware of all that, I snapped, "Where's Benny now?"

He shoved his thumb toward the ceiling.

Johnston said, "You damned fool!"

"Harry," I said, "we're going upstairs." I turned my attention to my buddy. "You," I said, "you go along the group and pick up the artillery. All six pieces, all by their barrels. You understand me?"

My buddy looked at Harry.

"You do want to keep Mr. Johnston alive," I suggested.

Hy Lochman was still on the floor. He had pushed himself away from the remains of his own sick stomach.

Billy Harmon had dropped into a chair. He was watching the whole show with a sort of desperate inattention. Regardless of what happened to Johnston, to me, even to the six monkeys all in a row, his career was ruined when the film reached Sevitze at the Department. Chicago, Los Angeles,

Washington, New York, wherever the police had interfered with the pyrotechnic activities of his more provocative guests, he had never once so much as suggested any duties the pigs might have to perform regardless of odds. Now, the pigs had something on him. A stupid, silly, home-grown pornography, live and on home movies. Billy Harmon was dead.

Before he died, I had to use him.

"Harmon," I said. "There's a fire laid in your fireplace. Go light it."

He stared at me dully. "In this weather?"

"Move," I snapped.

He moved with all the lack of grace of a lizard crawling into the sun after a cold snap. *Cuts them all down to size*, Nancy had said to Jon Hastings.

Harry Johnston said across his shoulder, "When are you going to stop these kids games?"

"A few things still to settle," I told Harry. I watched me buddy gather guns and a major TV personality light a fire while a Santa Ana wind was blowing. It all made a kind of awful sense. *I did not choose thee*, Nancy had said. *It was Love who made the choice, not I*. That had been from her college course on Victorian poets.

Harmon got the gas going

under the logs in the fireplace. He stood there, watching me rather vaguely. I glanced at my gun gatherer.

"Be a good boy," I said "and take them all over to the fireplace."

His expression was startled.

"Shall I remove a strip of flesh from the other side of Mr. Johnston's ribs?"

He stared at Harry Johnston. I couldn't see what Harry was staring at him. The monkey on the left end of the line took off from the flat in about one second. He curved it to come in from the side away from my right hand. I threw Harry away and shot the punk in the knee. A lot of lively statues froze again. My buddy with the guns had dropped all but one.

"I don't know how good you are," I told him, "but I grew up with a small arms range in the basement. My father was a cop. He taught me how to shoot. Do you want a trunk full of lead or just another broken kneecap like your friend?"

My buddy reached out with his left hand and reversed the gun he was holding. He bent to pick up the others.

Johnston looked up at me from the floor.

"Where in hell," he demanded, "did you come from?"

"Just a friend of Nancy's," I told him. "Maybe the only

one." *How do I love thee?* Nancy had asked me. *Let me count the ways.* . . How I loved her was just beginning to count.

I said to my buddy. "Just put the guns on the fire. All of them. Right up on top."

Then I turned to Johnston. "You never knew Nancy. You didn't, Billy Harmon didn't. Hy Lochman didn't. Not even her partner, Jon Hastings. She got even with you, all of you. Even, me too, I guess.

My buddy was hurrying away from the fire. So was Billy Harmon. I told them to join the congregation.

The fire was burning merrily. "There's going to be considerable excitement shortly," I said to Harry Johnston. "Shall we go up to see Benny Levine while there's still time?"

Harry got up awkwardly. He tried not to show the hell his right side was giving him. He walked toward the door with me beside him. I kept an eye on the scene. There was still six monkeys in a row. Only now, Billy Harmon, *Tonight's The Night's* Billy Harmon, had replaced the one on the floor with the broken knee cap. That one hated me. He was not even suffering so much as hating. Someday, somewhere, he would find me again. He told me that without saying a word. And I liked him a lot better than

hymn-rocker Lochman. Cowardice can be a sickness. He had it bad. The other punks I didn't worry about. Johnston would take care of them.

Just as we reached the door to the hall, it opened for us. One of the tan-clad security force had his hand on the knob. His expression was a curious combination of shock and wonder. Not that there was much he could do about. Lieutenant Sevitz and a number of police officers were with him. Besides those in plain clothes, I could distinguish between the uniforms of the Los Angeles Police Department and Beverly Hills. The shoulder patches and badges are different.

"What in hell—" Bob Sevitz began.

I dropped my gun into a pocket and shoved Johnston toward him.

"He bought the contract on Nancy," I said.

Only before I could explain all this in a cool and logical manner, the fireworks began. Shots flew where shells had been in the chamber and whole clips went off together. It was vintage Marx Brothers re-enacted by L.A.'s finest, Beverly Hill's purists, a hardcore sextet of Vegas imports, trying not to be shot from either direction, two TV stars, Harry Johnston



and me. Even Benny Levine came limping down the stairs, gun in hand.

That was a fortunate mistake on Benny's part. It saved me a lot of trouble.

Finally, Sevitz grabbed my arm and yelled, "Jake, will you for God's sake explain!"

Then, the fire department arrived.

The six punks went off to local free board and room.

Benny went off to the morgue.

Hy Lochman wanted to do a lot of talking. Johnston and Harmon shut him up quick.

And I went down town with Lieutenant Sevitz.

Every time I started to open my mouth, Sevitz told me to shut up. He had me booked on disturbing the peace. Told them to throw me in the drunk tank and forget I was there.

"I get one phone call," I told him.

"You shut up," Sevitz repeated, "or I'll cut off your tail and stuff it down your throat."

They led me off quietly, booked me, fingerprinted me, and turned me in with a group more fortunate than I. At least, they had had a drink recently. That, you could smell. I went over to a fairly clean corner and sat down.

Out of the nothingness of sleep, the slow dreams of eternity, there was a thunder on the deep. I came because you called to me.

That was Nancy, whispering my ear—Nancy and her god damned poetry!

Figure it out, boy. Nancy, working on her bachelor of arts and paying for her own education. Paying for it very well by dancing nude in bars, starring in blue movies, and attending stag parties as a paid performer. *Cuts them all down to size*, she had said.

Not cutting me. I was something private, something good, something to be protected—a divorce detective with the soul of a solid waste collector.

Because we surprised each other. Picked up each other and discovered private games. Developed a fantasy world with other people's words. Words we

each had kept secret in ourselves.

All shot now. All dead. All because of some stolen film.

That didn't fit. That didn't fit worth a damn!

Only the tiredness caught me then I slept. *To sleep, perchance to dream: ay there's the rub...* I woke with a start. So near to something...

The officer shaking my shoulder said, "The lieutenant wants to see you, Jacobs."

We got off the elevator at Homicide and Sevitz asked the officer to close the door as he left.

We stared at each other for a long time.

Finally, he said, "Of all the damned fools I've ever known—"

"You can lay off that," I said.

"A bottomless dancer," Sevitz said.

"A woman," I told him. "At least, the bastard who killed her is dead."

"We don't know that," the lieutenant said carefully.

"Benny Levine," I said. "He took the contract from Johnston. Harmon and Lochman are high priced properties. They have to be protected."

"We don't know that, either."

"You've seen the film?"

"Lochman didn't kill your girl friend."

"Only with his idiocy!"

"Blackmail," Sevitz said drily.

"No!" I said. "That doesn't fit." *Perchance to dream*. That was it. "My God!" I said.

"Yeah?" Sevitz raised a tired brow.

"I know why Nancy was killed."

"Go on."

"Not how she was killed, or by whom. We know that."

"Go on."

"Where is Jon Hastings?"

"You trying to be funny? He saved your life. You think you would have survived up there on Olympus if I hadn't rung the bell. Hastings guessed where you would be. He said you had saved his life. Time to save yours."

I leaned forward, pressing both temples, "Did Hastings tell you about Nancy's wig case?"

Sevitz nodded. "One of the smart things you ever did. Off the record, Jake, thanks very much."

"Hastings," I said, "where the hell is he?"

"We had to leave him in Santa Monica emergency," Sevitz told me. "A bullet may have nicked a lung. Thanks to you, he's still alive. He made sure we understood that."

"Is there any possibility I can see him?"

Sevitz studied me carefully for a long time. "You're free to go from here, although I'm damned if I know why. Neither Johnston or Harmon will bring any charges." He grinned without mirth. "And they sure as hell aren't going to let that ass, Lochman, do any talking."

"Santa Monica Police want to talk to you," Sevitz added, "Maybe even to thank you after they stop kicking your butt. Sandra Solar says you saved her life, tried to save Bowman's. Even that Blue Movie crew at Hastings's place is trying to make you out a hero."

"Bully for me" I agreed.

"Get the hell out of here," Sevitz snapped for the second time this day.

"Sure," I said. "About why I've got to see Hastings, he makes more sense than Nancy—"

Sevitz swung forward, slapping the top of his desk with both hands. "What in hell do you mean by that?"

"Nancy had no reason for blackmail. The blackmail she and her agent were killed for. Both of them were making out all right. Not by your or my standards, by theirs. They weren't murdered for anything they did. They were killed because of what Jon Hastings

did. About the time I pushed him into the bathtub, Hastings realized he wanted no part of what he had done."

"Pushed him into the bathtub?" The lieutenant demanded, "What in hell do you mean?"

"That's how I saved his life. That's also when he began the Nancy invention. Nancy had been killed to prevent the blackmail he had intended. Nancy and Bowman were already dead before he began his move. That's why he ran away from me in an apparent attempt to get Nancy's wig case. He wanted every thing to point back to Nancy, away from him." I paused, and rubbed my forehead. "Why did he have to try for the wig case before he let me loose on the leads to Harmon and Johnston?"

Sevitz grinned. "You're not thinking, Jake." He picked up the phone and dialed an in-house extension.

"Jeffers," he said. A moment later. "Did you check that film tin in the Greer case?"

"I see." Pause.

He hung up the phone and stared at me bleakly.

"You don't need to go to Santa Monica," he told me. "Your girl friend left no prints on the film container. Hastings did. He knew Nancy had never

handled the film or the can it was in."

Sevitz stood up and held out his hand.

"Sorry, Jake."

"Thanks for saving my life," I said.

"Glad we could be of service," Sevitz said blandly.

They gave me all sorts of things back, like my belt, my money, my keys, my credit cards; also my black, flat, fat little friend. I was as glad that this time she had killed nobody as that she had burned Harry Johnston's ribs.

On the way home, I bought a steak.

At home, I drank a pint.

Somewhere between drink and drunk I read, or remembered,

*Then falls thy shadow,
Cynara! the night is thine;
And I am desolate and sick
of an old passion*

*Yea, hungry for the lips of
my desire —*

*I have been faithful to thee,
Cynara!*

in my own fashion.

Nancy Greer had hated Dowson.

I could learn to.

He was, after all, a rather lousy poet.

Still, I felt I rather had done his kind of job... in my own fashion.

Later on, I slept.

MOTHER of PEARL

She was too ugly to live and too mean to die. He nodded. Maybe she could stand a little help to speed things up...

by CLARK HOWARD

PEARL DEVLIN set aside the travel section of Sunday's paper and got up from the table. She tied an apron around the good dress she had worn to mass, and began clearing away the lunch-



eon dishes. As usual, her mother immediately followed suit with an apron of her own; and, as usual, Pearl protested.

"I'll take care of the dishes, Ma," she said with just a hint of irritation. "Go ahead and finish your tea."

"No, that's all right," Mrs. Williams mumbled. She was already up and doing Pearl's work, and as usual doing it twice as fast but only half as well.

Pearl sighed softly. There was no use arguing about it; her mother wouldn't listen anyway. And if she made an issue of it, as she had done several times in the past, everyone in the house would be miserable. It was bad enough that her mother looked mad most of the time, without her actually being mad.

"What are we going to do today, Pearl?" her mother asked. "Just sit around the house again, like always?"

"I don't know, Ma," Pearl said. "George said something about having some studying to do."

"Fine husband he is," the old lady snapped. "Can't even take his family out for a drive on Sunday afternoon."

"He's trying to improve himself, Ma," Pearl said. "If he can pass the state broker's examination and get a license, he can go into real estate and

probably make a lot more money than he makes now."

"What's wrong with the job he's got?" Pearl's mother wanted to know.

"Nothing, Ma, but after all he's only a clerk—"

"Listen," the old lady interrupted, "he should be thankful he's got a job at all. Plenty of people are out of work and don't know where next month's rent is coming from. It makes me sick the way some people aren't ever happy with what they've got. I've been on the same job now for thirteen years. You don't see me running and changing jobs every year like some people do."

"But it's different with you, Ma," Pearl tried to explain. "George has to plan for the future. He has a family to think of."

"Oh? I suppose I was thinking of myself all those years?" her mother said indignantly. The old woman's face tightened. "Do you think it was easy for me after your father walked out? Don't forget, I had to raise you all by myself! Your father never gave me a cent. He never thought of anyone but himself—him and his drinking and running around. I had to bring you up all alone, from the time you were three years old! I worked my fingers to the bone

to make a lady out of you, and let me tell you it wasn't easy! Many's the time I did without so you could have the things you needed."

"I know, Ma," Pearl conceded, "I know all that. I didn't say you were thinking of yourself all those years; all I said was that in George's case it's different."

"Sure," the old woman almost spat, "it's always different, whatever I say. You're always right, you and George. Neither one of you ever gives any thought at all to what I'd like to do."

"All right, Ma, all right," Pearl said wearily. "What would you like to do today?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all. Just go on and please yourselves. I'll go somewhere by myself."

"Ma, you brought this up; now what do you want to do?"

Mrs. Williams shrugged. "I just thought we could go for a drive somewhere. After all, it is Sunday. People aren't supposed to sit around the house on a Sunday."

"All right, Ma," Pearl said, "I'll ask George if we can go out somewhere. Now, please, let's try not to have any arguments in the house today. Let's try to have a nice Sunday for a change."

Pearl's mother finished clear-

ing the table and ran water in the sink to wash the dishes. She would, Pearl knew, have the dishes dried and put away in fifteen minutes, but they wouldn't be half clean; and tonight at dinner or tomorrow at breakfast George would find dried food on his fork or plate, and he'd say something about it and then another argument would begin. But for the moment at least, her mother was quieting down and Pearl did not want to wind her up again by mentioning the dishes. So she just let it go.

"I'll ask George about the drive, Ma," Pearl said, removing her apron and leaving the kitchen to her mother. The old lady went about hurriedly washing the dishes, muttering to herself as she worked.

Pearl found George in their bedroom. He was lying across the bed, with books and papers and study guides spread in all directions around him.

"Hi," Pearl said. "You busy?"

"No, no, of course not," George answered, "I've got this stuff spread out all over the bed for the fun of it."

"Please, no comedy," Pearl pleaded. "I've had all the laughs I can take for one day."

George put down his pencil, sighing. "What is it this time?" he asked patiently.

"Ma and I were wondering if we could all go for a drive this afternoon," Pearl said.

George looked around the bed at all his study material. "I've got twenty-four sections of the Real Estate Code to memorize. I should try and finish it."

"George," Pearl's voice took on a slight edge, "you can't shove your family into a corner every weekend and spend the rest of your life studying—"

"The rest of my life? Pearl," George groaned, "the examination is only two months away."

"Two months is a long time. It seems to me you could take off once in awhile and give some thought to your wife."

"To my wife, or to my wife's mother?" George said knowingly.

"Well, she's human too, you know, after all—"

"Sometimes I wonder," George said half to himself, but Pearl heard him anyway.

"There's no need to get nasty about it," she snapped. "After all, she is my mother!"

"Yes," he said wearily, "I know. How well I know." He put aside the study guide he had been underlining, and got up. "All right, dear. Go tell your mother we'll go out for a drive."

Pearl left the bedroom. George looked at his watch and

saw that it was ten past one. Depending on where Pearl and her mother wanted to go, he might get back home by four, or five at the latest. Then there would be supper to eat and he had to spend at least an hour playing with Angie and Beth, his two daughters, before they went to bed, all of which would take him up to around eight o'clock.

By that time Pearl's mother would be ready to leave and he'd have to drive her home. She lived only a few blocks away and of course she would say that she could walk home alone, that she would be all right, but he would have to insist on driving her because if he didn't Pearl would rant for two or three days about how thoughtless he was.

So, George, thought resignedly, that just about took care of his studying for this weekend. He couldn't start memorizing Code sections at nine o'clock at night, not when he had to get up at five-thirty the next morning to go to work.

He went into the living room. Pearl and her mother were getting the girls ready to go, Pearl adjusting Angie's dress, and her mother trying to put a bow on Beth's pigtail.

"Ouch!" Beth cried. "You're pulling my hair, Grandma!"

"Keep quiet," Mrs. Williams said sharply, "that doesn't hurt."

"How do you know?" George said. "You can't feel it." He took the bow from his mother-in-law's hand and gently put it on Beth's braided hair.

Beth smiled appreciatively. Mrs. Williams' mother's mouth drew into a tight line.

"Okay," Pearl said. "Everybody's ready."

"I'll get the car keys," George said. "By the way, where are we going?"

Pearl looked inquiringly at her mother. The old woman avoided her glance and busied herself straightening a vase of flowers.

"Where do you want to go, Ma?" Pearl asked.

"Anywhere," her mother said. "I don't care. Just out somewhere. Why should I have to be the one to decide?"

Here it comes, George thought. Round two.

"Because it was your idea to go out, that's why!" Pearl said hotly. "You're the one who started nagging about it right after lunch—"

"I didn't start it, you did!"

As George stood watching his wife and her mother, a cold anger began to creep through him. He managed to control it long enough to send Angie and Beth out to play, after which he

stepped between the two snapping women and glared first at one, then the other.

"I was in the middle of some very important studying for my real estate broker's examination," he said levelly to his wife, "and I interrupted it in order to please you two this afternoon by taking you out. Am I to understand now that you didn't even have in mind where you want to go?"

"Well, Ma just mentioned something about a drive," said Pearl.

"I didn't say anyplace in particular," Pearl's mother added.

George took a deep breath. "No place in particular," he said coldly. "Just out. A little drive somewhere. I've got twenty-four sections of the Real Estate Code to memorize, and I have to give up my valuable study time to take you two out to just no place in particular! And not only that, but first I have to listen to the two of you argue and yell at each other about who's going to decide just where no place in particular is! Can you think of any more damned ways to waste time?"

"I can!" Mrs. Williams snapped. "Those books you've always got your nose in, that's nothing but a big waste of time! Maybe if you'd think about

your family a little more instead of—”

“For your information,” George cut in stiffly, “I do happen to be thinking about my family. That’s exactly why I’m doing it. And as long as we’re on the subject, let’s get one other thing straight too: my family consists of my wife and my daughters. Whenever I give any thought to the pleasure of my family, those are the people I include—and no one else! Do I make myself clear?”

“George!” Pearl almost gasped. “How can you talk to Ma like that! After all, I think we owe her—”

“We don’t owe her a thing, Pearl,” George said flatly. “Oh, yes, I know how she struggled to raise you all by herself, and what a hard time she had and all that, but that doesn’t give her a license to make us miserable for the rest of her life!”

Pearl bit her lip as she watched her mother’s face. The old woman’s countenance slackened into a practiced look of crushed feelings mixed with a dash of heartbreak and a pinch of anguish. *Oh Lord, George thought, here we go again. Act Ninety-three of The Unwanted Mother, starring that well-known martyr, my mother-in-law.*

“Well,” the old woman said

in a quavering voice, “I can see I’m not wanted around here any longer. I’ll just get my purse and leave—”

“Now, Ma,” Pearl whined, “there’s no need to—” Pearl’s lip began to tremble and her eyes grew misty. “Oh, Ma—”

“Tell the children Grandma said good-bye,” the old woman added, her voice breaking. Then she hurried out the door, head down, shoulders drooping, the personification of a lost soul.

George rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. *Tune in next Sunday, he thought, for another nerve-wracking episode of Life With Pearl’s Mother.*

“Well, I hope you’re happy now!” Pearl stormed, turning on him furiously.

The wave of cold anger swept over George again. “Oh, I am, I am! How could a man *not* be happy, with such a perfect wife and such an ideal mother-in-law!”

George nearly took the screen door with him as he stormed out of the house.

THE FOLLOWING Saturday morning, George Devlin sat in a small, tastefully furnished downtown office. Behind a desk facing him sat a scholarly-looking grey-haired man who listened quietly as George told his story.

“It’s the same thing every

time Pearl's mother comes around," George was saying. "I gave you the details of last Sunday as an example. Similar incidents happen all the time."

"I see," said his listener, nodding thoughtfully. "Tell me, when did you make up your mind to seek help from a marriage counselor?"

George shrugged. "I don't know exactly. I've thought about it once or twice before. After last Sunday I was pretty upset. My stomach has been acting up lately and I suspect I might have the beginnings of an ulcer. Plus which I'm positive that my marriage is slowly going on the rocks. The whole situation is just getting me down. I thought perhaps if I talked it over with a stranger, someone not personally involved—"

"That's very good judgment," the man said approvingly. "Incidentally, how did you happen to choose me? Did someone refer you?"

"No," George shook his head. He fingered a slip of paper from his pocket. "I just looked in the classified section. Yours was the first name in the column—Alfred Abbat, Specialist in Individual Psychotherapy."

"Did you discuss your decision with your wife?"

"No. I made up my mind on



Wednesday. Pearl didn't start talking to me again until yesterday."

"What is your wife's attitude toward you after one of these incidents with her mother?"

George grunted. "She usually ends up mad at both of us, and both of us mad at her. Everybody is mad at everybody else. There's no family warmth; it's like living in a mausoleum."

"I see," said Abbat. "How is the situation usually resolved?"

"Well," George said, shrugging, "Pearl usually makes up with her mother by Friday and then things just kind of settle down between us again. For awhile, anyway."

"Does your wife always reconcile with her mother first? Before you and Pearl make up?"

"Yes. You see, Pearl and I never really make up formally.

After she and her mother become friendly again, Pearl and I just kind of forget it and get back to normal."

Abbat nodded. "Now, you say she usually makes up with her mother by Friday. Why Friday in particular?"

"Saturday is shopping day," George explained. "I always drive Pearl and her mother over to the shopping center. They have lunch and spend the afternoon making the rounds of the stores."

"I see. Saturday is their day together then?"

"I guess," George said. "They sure as hell don't let anything interfere with it, I know that."

"How is this reconciliation between your wife and her mother usually effected?" Abbat wanted to know. "That is, just how do they go about making up?"

"Well, Pearl just finally breaks down and calls her. Then they make up and make their plans for Saturday."

"It's always your wife who initiates the reconciliation?"

"Yes, always."

"Her mother never calls first?"

"Never," George said flatly.

"Have you ever pointed that fact out to your wife?"

"Often. I've told her several times that she's foolish for

giving in to her mother so much."

"And what," Abbat asked, "has been her usual reply to that?"

George Devlin shrugged again. "She just gets mad and reminds me how much her mother did for her as a child, what a hard time her mother had raising her, things like that. It never does any good for me to talk to her. She always runs right back to mother."

"Does her mother ever refuse to make up after your wife calls her? Does she play hard to get, for instance?"

"Not on your life," George said wryly. "If she did that, she might miss her transportation to the shopping center."

"What do you mean?" Abbat said, frowning.

George sat forward in the chair. "You see, as far as Pearl's mother is concerned, I'm not really a son-in-law. She didn't want Pearl to marry me, and she never has liked me much. To her, I'm just a glorified chauffeur. If I didn't have a car, the old woman probably wouldn't even admit I was alive."

Abbat nodded. "When you say your wife's mother didn't want her daughter to marry you. Do you mean that literally?"

"Oh yes," said George. "Her

mother had someone else all picked out for Pearl."

"Did she ever actually advise her daughter not to marry you?"

"Yes."

"Do you have any opinion as to why your wife's mother preferred this other party to you?"

"Well, I—" George started to answer, then hesitated.

"Be frank," Abbat prompted. "Give me an honest answer."

"All right. I don't want to sound like a know-it-all, but I think Pearl's mother knew I could see through her too clearly. I wasn't taken in by her little acts—the Unwanted Mother routine, the business of always reminding everyone about the sacrifices she made for Pearl, things like that. I think the old lady knew all along that I thought she was a big fake."

Abbat sat back in his chair. He opened a drawer and took out a pipe, filling it from a humidor on the desk. He lighted up, slowly and patiently, drawing a good fire into the bowl, letting the match burn almost down to his fingers before he extinguished it. He leaned forward on the desk again and studied George for a moment.

"Have you ever heard of an

Oedipus complex?" he asked.

"I think so," George nodded, "but I'm not sure just what it is."

"Well, in simple language, it is an attachment between a son and his mother that has become stronger than is normally desirable. You've heard, I'm sure, someone referred to as being 'tied to his mother's apron strings.' In essence, that is a fairly apt definition of the thing in its simplest form. There is also the reverse, in which a daughter is strongly attached to her father; that is called an Electra complex. Both situations contain the ingredients of an overbearing parent and an immature offspring. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," said George, "I think so."

"Fine." Abbat took another long pull on the pipe and sat back in his chair again.

"These complexes," he explained, "are disorders which are fairly common. Some of them are minor problems which can be dealt with relatively simply; others are very serious, very disturbing conditions that take months, sometimes years, to correct.

"In addition to the complexes themselves, there are secondary conditions which are offshoots, or second cousins, to the Oedipus and Electra

complexes. These are conditions where a weak son is dominated by a strong father, or an immature daughter by an aggressive mother. From what you've told me, it sounds like the latter may be the case with your wife."

George frowned. "I'll admit that Pearl is very immature at times, Mr. Abbat," he said slowly, "but in all fairness I think I should tell you that I've never known her mother to be the aggressive type."

"There are all kinds of aggression," Abbat said easily. "Aggression doesn't necessarily have to show, you know. For instance, the manner in which your mother-in-law instigated the idea to go for a drive last Sunday, even though she had no place in particular to go, and then sought to put all the blame for the ensuing argument on your wife; that was a subtle form of aggression. Her constant playing at being—as you put it—an unwanted mother; that is a reverse form of aggression. It all accomplishes the same end as forceful and direct aggression would accomplish—and it's much less noticeable."

"I see," George Devlin said quietly. He nodded his head, turning over in his mind all the many other little episodes in which his mother-in-law had

created some kind of dissention and then somehow stepped aside to watch the fireworks. "Yes," he said thoughtfully, "I think I'm beginning to understand." He leaned forward anxiously. "What can be done about it, Mr. Abbat?"

"That's hard to say," Abbat told him. "There's no cut-and-dried solution to any psychogenic disorder, you know. There never is. In this instance, it seems fairly clear that the proper person to be treated is your wife. From what you've told me, it's rather doubtful that her mother could be helped by psychotherapy even if she would consent to try it. No, I'd say we'd have to deal with this problem through your wife."

"Well, how would you go about it?" George asked.

"Oh," Abbat scratched his chin with the stem of his pipe, "first of all, an initial consultation with your wife to outline the problem; then a preliminary psychological examination to classify her personality; that would be followed by private therapy sessions—"

"No," George shook his head firmly, "it won't work. Pearl would never agree to it. She'd think it was some kind of plot I'd cooked up against her mother. Look, isn't there some way you could get to her

through me? I mean, couldn't you tell me some way to go about it so that Pearl wouldn't actually know?"

"Can't be done," Abbat cut him off. "Impossible. The most important element of successful therapy is that the patient knows exactly what is being done, and why. Attempting to trick a patient into a personality change would be a waste of time."

"I see," George said. His shoulders sagged in disappointment.

"Of course," Abbat said slowly, "there is one other way—"

"How?" George asked quickly.

"Eliminate your mother-in-law."

"Oh, sure," said George, his voice tinged with bitter sarcasm, "that would be great, all right. But the old lady would never move away, and if we moved she'd just follow us."

"That wasn't exactly what I meant," said Abbat. "What I was referring to was a more permanent form of elimination."

George's eyes narrowed and his brow wrinkled. "I'm not sure I quite understand you, Mr. Abbat."

"Let me put it this way," said Abbat, laying aside his now cold pipe, "you have a problem.

That problem is your mother-in-law. Her presence is creating dissention in your domestic life. It is affecting both your mental and physical health. Sooner or later it will affect your wife in the same way; undoubtedly it will one day begin to affect the emotional development of your children. In short, one person, your mother-in-law, has the potential to damage the lives of four other persons. I'm sure you will admit that in such a case it is no more than good sense to say that it is far better to eliminate the one person in order to preserve the four."

"Yes," said George, but—

"Wait," Abbat said, raising a hand; "let me finish. Now, in our conversation thus far we have established that your mother-in-law would probably not be helped at all by therapy, and that your wife would probably not agree to try it. Therefore, we arrive at a problematic dead-end.

"Now, I have devised quite a unique system for dealing with those cases which would ordinarily have to be declined because of this difficulty. My system is very simple, very basic: I merely make arrangements to remove from the scene that person who is the primary cause of the problem. And the person is removed, as I said, permanently."

George's mouth had suddenly gone dry. "You mean—"

"Exactly," Abbat replied. "Now before you conjure up any righteous indignation, take a moment to look at the cold, hard facts. Your mother-in-law is probably in her middle fifties, with a life expectancy of sixty-seven, so she has, say, twelve years left to live. From your description of her, she is undoubtedly quite frustrated, unhappy to the point where she attempts to make everyone else unhappy also, and in general is leading not only an emotionally non-productive life but in addition is actually something of a menace to those around her. Now tell me frankly, do you really think it's such a terrible thing to eliminate a person of that type?"

"I certainly do," George Devlin said firmly. "It's a crime, a sin. It's—"

"Perhaps you are thinking of it as a lurid, bloody ax murder or something of that nature," Abbat suggested. "It isn't, I assure you. It is all done very cleanly, very quickly, and—for insurance purposes—very accidentally. You see, I have arrangements with certain people who work at various places of interest—local amusement parks, beaches, resort lakes, museums, theaters, all sorts of

places where a man might take his wife or sister or mother-in-law, and where that person might meet with an accident. You may remember the insurance salesman's wife who fell out the window of the balcony powder room at the Downtown Theater last month. Or the sister of that young architect who broke her neck while horseback riding. Or the mother of the bank teller who tripped on the marble stairs of the art gallery. Or the—"

"All right," George burst out almost in panic, "I've heard enough! If you think for one minute that I'd even consider such a fantastic thing, you're out of your mind. Sure, I'll admit I dislike the old woman, but not to the point of murder. For you to even suggest such a thing—why, it's a wonder you aren't in an asylum!"

"Oh, come now," said Abbat, smiling, "it isn't a wonder at all. I'm not in an asylum because I don't deserve to be. I'm not insane, you know, nor am I a murderer, at least not in the technically accepted sense of the word. I merely provide a service that many people need—and at a very reasonable price, too, I might add: only ten thousand dollars. For people who won't receive any insurance benefits, I even have a time-payment plan

of forty dollars per week for five years, interest included; it works out very well for the average working man like yourself."

Abbat folded his hands on the desk and smiled. "It's an invaluable service to those who have no other way out of their unhappy situations, and you'd be surprised how many people avail themselves of it. Oh, I've been turned down by some, of course, but not by many. And those who did decline had the good sense not to take the story to the authorities. They knew they'd never be believed."

George stood up and took out his wallet.

"I don't care to hear any more, Mr. Abbat," he said stiffly. "How much do I owe you for this—this consultation or whatever you call it?"

"Tut, tut," Abbat said pleasantly, "no charge at all. There is a fee only if you accept my help."

"I'd prefer to pay," said George. He threw twenty dollars on the desk and started for the door.

"If you should change your mind," Abbat called after him, "take your mother-in-law to Funland Amusement Park tomorrow. I'm sure your family would enjoy the Spook House. When you buy your tickets, pay for them with a five-dollar bill



folded into thirds, and say to the ticket seller, 'I hope my mother-in-law doesn't frighten the spooks.' The ticket seller will know what to do."

"You're mad," George muttered as he hurried from the office.

THE FOLLOWING day, Sunday, Pearl put aside the travel section of the paper and got up from the table. She tied an apron around the good dress she had worn to Mass, and began clearing away the dishes. As usual, her mother also got up from the table and began helping her. Pearl did not even bother to protest today; it wouldn't do any good anyway, and besides, her mother was still pouting a little from last Sunday. So Pearl just quietly kept her mouth shut while the old woman started her halfway job of washing the dishes.

George was out in the yard, prowling around for signs of a gopher he suspected was getting at the roots of Pearl's flowers. As he moved slowly about the side of the house, he could not help remembering his interview with Mr. Abbat the previous day. Somehow, as he idled about the familiar atmosphere of his own yard, the whole thing seemed vaguely like a bad dream. He almost had to force himself to believe that it had

happened at all. It did not seem possible that things like that could be done in a modern civilization. People just weren't like that.

And yet he did remember reading about the woman falling down the stairs at the art gallery. And the young girl being thrown from a supposedly tame horse. And the woman, who fell out of the theater window. He remembered all of them—clearly.

George Devlin shuddered. He walked on around the house. Near the kitchen window he spotted a small mound of fresh dirt where a gopher had dug out. *So I was right*, he thought, *it was a gopher that had been killing the flowers*. He went into the garage and got a hand spade and the can of poison gopher pellets. Kneeling below the kitchen window, he began to dig down to the tunnel under the mound of dirt.

"I don't know how you stand this kitchen," the voice of Pearl's mother drifted out the window. "It's such a cold, cheerless room."

"I don't see anything wrong with it, Ma," Pearl answered.

George paused in his digging. He could almost see Pearl looking around at the kitchen walls speculatively.

"Why, there's no color in here at all," the old woman

said. "That green is too dark, and the white trim is all faded."

"I don't know, Ma," Pearl said, "it looks quite all right to me."

That's it, honey, George thought. You tell her. It's your kitchen.

"You should see Mrs. Duffy's kitchen," Mrs. Williams went on. "You know Mrs. Duffy. She lives with her daughter and son-in-law over on Herald Lane. Well, they just redecorated their kitchen and it's really lovely."

Who cares? George thought. *Go on, honey, he silently implored his wife, ask her who cares?*

"Oh?" said Pearl. "What's it look like?"

"Well, Mrs. Duffy picked out a beautiful flowered wallpaper; her daughter and son-in-law always let her decide on things like that, they treat her so wonderfully. Anyway, they used this wallpaper for the breakfast nook, and then they painted the rest of the walls a lovely pink—Mrs. Duffy picked out the paint, too; her son-in-law insisted on it. You should see it, it's lovely."

Sounds hideous, George thought.

"Sounds nice," Pearl agreed with her mother.

"You could do the same with this room," the old

woman said. "It doesn't cost much at all, just for the paint and wallpaper. George could do all the work."

George clenched his teeth. *Nice of you to think of me.*

"I don't know, Ma," Pearl said, hesitantly, "George is pretty busy right now. He still has that realtor's exam coming up."

"Well," said the old woman, "of course, if he thinks more of that than he does his wife's comfort—"

"Now, Ma, it's not that at all. He's just trying to better himself."

Mrs. Williams grunted. "Mrs. Duffy's son-in-law was just promoted out at the plant," she said pointedly. "He's third in charge of the shipping room now and got twenty-cents an hour raise. He doesn't have to keep his nose in a book every weekend to get ahead."

"You know, now that you mention it, Ma," Pearl said, "this kitchen does look awfully cold. I suppose it could use a brighter color."

"I saw a lovely flowered wallpaper at Potter's Hardware the other day," the old woman began.

Outside the window George Devlin shook his head in a slow, helpless motion. He stuck the spade into the ground and got up and went over to the back

door. Sighing heavily, he entered the kitchen.

"George," Pearl almost snapped, "something's got to be done about this kitchen. It's like a morgue in here. Can't you take time out from your studying to paint it and maybe paper one wall? After all, you can't keep your nose buried in those books all the time. You've got to give some consideration to your family, too, you know."

"Okay," George said pleasantly, "how about next Saturday?"

Pearl and her mother stared at him incredulously.

"What did you say?" Pearl asked hesitantly.

"I said, how about next Saturday? That soon enough for you?"

"Why—why, yes, that's fine, George. Will you still have time to study?"

"Oh, sure," George said easily, "I can study Saturday night while you and your mother are watching television." He winked at his wife.

"Just pick out the paint and paper you want, honey, and have it delivered. I'll get right on it Saturday after I drive you and your mother shopping." George turned toward the bedroom hallway, then paused and looked back at his wife.

"Say, honey, why don't you round up the girls and we can all drive over to Funland for the afternoon. We can take a ride on the ferris wheel and eat some cotton candy and maybe even go through the Spook House. How about it?"

"Why, that sounds swell, George," Pearl beamed. "But what about your studying?"

"Don't worry about that, I can study tonight while you and your mother are watching television. Come on now, call the girls in and you and your mother get ready." He smiled widely. "Funland, here we come!"

George Devlin walked down to the bedroom to check his wallet and make sure he had a five-dollar bill to fold into thirds.

Complete in the Next Issue —

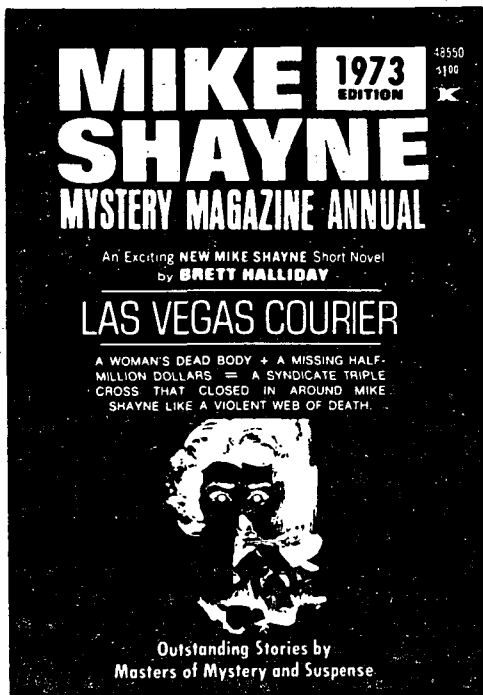
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THE BASEMENT ROOM

by
JOHN
LUTZ



He had fashioned his house of death cunningly and well. No one could enter and come out alive. He shivered. No one? . . .

SAY THIS about Bernice—she believed in getting things done, and so she did them.

Her husband Eldon, on the other hand, was more than something of a procrastinator. It was his philosophy that problems, like clouds, if simply ignored long enough, would often drift away. And while Bernice wasn't exactly careless with money, she wouldn't

hesitate to spend what had to be spent. Eldon, to the contrary, was notoriously tight-fisted.

Another of Bernice's traits was curiosity, or nosiness, as Eldon thought of it. Not that she was overly interested in other people's concerns. She would enter the affairs of acquaintances slowly but inevitably, gradually permeating their

situations as water wends its way into too-porous cement. There was no defense against her. Eldon, however, was aloof, self-contained, even secretive at times in the jealous protection of his privacy. Eldon was tall, sharp-featured and almost completely bald; Bernice was a short, round-featured woman, attractive for her forty-five years, and with a huge mop of naturally curly chestnut hair.

After fifteen years of marriage Eldon and Bernice Koins were living examples of the adage that opposites attract, but only initially.

"Eldon," she said to him one morning before breakfast, "it's already so hot in here I could fry your eggs right on your plate. When are you going to have the air conditioner repaired?"

The air conditioning unit for the house had stopped working in mid-July, and week after week Eldon had debated whether or not they could afford to have it repaired at that time. They had sweltered through many an argument about the air conditioner, and now here it was August.

"It'll be fixed soon," Eldon told her, thinking that September and cooler weather was right around the corner. "The Jantzens down the street don't even have an air conditioner."

"The Jantzens are also in Canada," Bernice said, setting his plate of bacon and eggs before him.

"Maybe my raise will be on my next pay check," Eldon said, nibbling a piece of bacon and ignoring Canada. "I'm bound to get a raise. The company gives everyone a raise after five years."

Eldon was a representative of Loomis Tranquillizer Company, and he traveled almost continuously, which was fortunate for the preservation of his marriage. He was due to leave that very day on a flight to New York and would be gone six days.

"I'm getting tired of being cooped up in this steam bath while you're in some airconditioned hotel room," Bernice said, flouncing across the kitchen and seating herself opposite Eldon. "I'm liable to just draw some money from the savings account and call an air conditioner repairman while you're gone."

Eldon didn't change expression. He knew she wouldn't dare do that.

"That money's in the savings account for a particular reason," he said firmly, adding cream to his coffee. "I told you we might get the air conditioner fixed next week."

"Always next week or next this or next that," Bernice

complained, spooning sugar into her black coffee. "The only way I can get anything fixed around this house is save up enough money myself from my household allowance to pay for it."

"So save enough to buy a new compressor for the air conditioner," Eldon said derisively. He dabbed at his lips with his folded napkin and stood from his unfinished breakfast, irritated and completely without appetite. "I have to go now if I'm going to catch my plane. I'll be at the *Langton* if you want to call me."

Bernice stared up at him coldly with her round blue eyes. "Your reservation says the *Reardon Hotel*."

Eldon's thin lips drew even thinner and a gray vein throbbled near his temple. "You've been in my attache case, haven't you?"

"And why not?" Bernice said indignantly. "I am your wife. I needed a pen in a hurry and thought you might have one in there. You did, clipped on that little notebook with all those people's names and addresses in it. Is that Mr. Calder the same man we knew in Buffalo?"

"No," Eldon said evenly, "he's not."

Bernice started to say

something else, but Eldon turned and walked abruptly from the kitchen. He would file for divorce against Bernice, he told himself for the hundredth time. Then he began to ponder the various consequences, especially the alimony payments he would have to begin making.

The main trouble with living with Bernice was that Eldon's privacy, one of the things he valued most, had diminished to the point where it was almost nonexistent. Intolerable. He had even thought—very fleetingly of course—of murdering Bernice, arranging a fatal 'accident'. But for all the methods he considered Eldon lacked the courage even if he could summon up the decisiveness.

He was in the living room, by the door, with his luggage and his attache case.

"I'm going," he said loudly. He thought he should say something.

"Go," came the voice from the kitchen. "I'll call the *Reardon* later to make sure you got there."

Intolerable. Eldon hesitated on the porch, trying to decide if he should slam the door. He concluded that would only give Bernice the satisfaction of knowing she had angered him, and he closed the door softly

and turned away to the heat of the rising morning sun.

Perhaps it was the quest for privacy that caused Eldon to construct the room in the basement. He had an inexact layman's ability at carpentry, but he planned ahead thoughtfully and was painstakingly careful.

The room wasn't very large, about ten by ten, occupying one corner of the basement. Eldon purchased the material and worked on it most of his vacation then in the evenings after work. During the various stages of construction Bernice would come down the basement stairs, look about and try to draw him into conversation so she could find out exactly why he was building the room. Did he plan to use it for storage, an office, a den? But Eldon studiously ignored all questions concerning the room, casually drowning out some of them with buzz of saw or crash of hammer.

Once he had the studwork up the rest went quickly. Eldon certainly hadn't skimped on the materials. The studs were broad and close together, the paneling fairly expensive, thick and deeply grained birch. The floor was made up of squares of gray asbestos tile with swirling designs in them. There was a solid wooden door, thick and



soundproof. For ventilation Eldon had cut into the ductwork and installed a small register near the double-layered wallboard ceiling.

When he was finished he closed the door to his room and told Bernice to stay out of it.

Eldon didn't leave town for over a week after the room was finished, then he was called on to make a four day jaunt through the midwest. He left as usual with his beat up luggage and his black leather attache case, and he surprised Bernice

slightly by telling her the hotels he'd be staying at so she could call him.

The first day of Eldon's absence Bernice merely walked down the basement stairs and stood for a long time scrutinizing the closed large wooden door to the room. The second day she tried the knob, found that it turned. She pressed her ear hard against the cool wood of the door, heard nothing, then went back upstairs. On the third day she had a late breakfast, walked down the basement stairs, stood before the room's door for a moment, turned the knob, drew several deep breaths and shoved the door open.

The room was empty.

Absolutely empty, spotlessly clean and empty. Bernice backed out, shut the door and walked slowly up the stairs.

Eldon was back as scheduled, but was due to leave again in three days and would be gone almost two weeks. He acted perfectly normal, didn't mention the room or even seem to go near it. The night before he was to leave Bernice cooked his favorite veal and potato dinner and tried to draw him out.

"Incidentally," she said absently as she passed him the butter, "what are you planning to use it for?"

"It. What do you mean?"

"The room you built," Bernice said casually. "You know, in the basement."

Eldon said something unintelligible around a mouthful of veal.

"Did you say den, dear?"

"Tender," Eldon corrected as he took a sip of tea. "I said the veal is exceedingly tender."

"Thank you."

"What I meant," Eldon said, "was that it probably is an unnecessarily expensive cut."

"But the room—"

"There is no need to change the subject," Eldon said, clashing serving spoon on plate as he took another huge helping of mashed potatoes.

Eldon left early the next morning for the airport, holding to his silence.

It was two mornings later before Bernice again made her way down the basement stairs to stand before the room. This time she found the door part way open. Decisively, she pushed it open wider and stepped inside.

Still empty. Bernice left the room and went slowly back upstairs.

She poured herself a second glass of tomato juice and sat thoughtfully at the kitchen table. Something! He had to have built the room for something! She sipped the juice

slowly, staring out the window at high unmoving clouds.

When Bernice was finished with her tomato juice she went back downstairs, entered the room and began to examine the sturdy panelling carefully for some kind of concealed compartment or trick door. She was lightly tapping the north wall with her knuckles when the telephone rang faintly from above.

The caller was a man who understood that she and her husband owned their own home and wanted to sell her some storm windows. Bernice refused him, hung up and came back to the basement. She reentered the room and absently closed the door behind her.

When Eldon returned from his business trip late the next week he walked through the front door, stood listening, then called his wife's name three times, each louder than the last. When there was no answer he began to walk slowly, almost aimlessly, from one room to the next. At last he went to the basement.

He stood before the door to the room, his ear pressed to the wood, as Bernice had once stood. After a few minutes his hand went to the knob, twisted slowly, more slowly. He was perspiring and breathing rapidly as he pushed inward.

Eldon looked first at the long scratches on the paneled walls, the inside of the door, even the ceiling. The vibrant silence hummed in his ears as he forced himself to look at what had been only a shapeless form on the edge of his vision.

Bernice lay curled on her side near the center of the floor, arms crossed, mutilated, claw-like hands grasping her forearms. Her right cheek was pressed flat to the smooth tile floor and her blue eyes were open and calm, as if equating the near horizon.

Kneeling beside her, staring at her with that curiosity reserved for the dead, Eldon wondered how she had died. Not suffocation, for he'd vented the room. Hunger perhaps. Thirst? Fright? The empty calm in her eyes was belied by the grotesquely leering tautness of her mouth.

Where before Eldon couldn't bring himself to look at Bernice, now he couldn't stop looking at her as he rehearsed in his mind the story he'd tell the police.

My God, it was one of those freak accidents. She must have just happened to walk in to look around and... The room was going to be my office. I never intended to lock the door so when I hung it I never even noticed what side the lock was

on. I never even knew the knob had one of those locks that held the outside knob firm while the inside one turned. Only this time the outside was the inside. One of those freak accidents. . .

Eldon was satisfied he could appear sufficiently grief-stricken for the next week or so. Still staring at Bernice, he straightened, and for a split second the distant snap and low hum that he heard meant nothing to him. Then there was a subtle movement of air, a low swishing sound ending in a soft click, and Eldon was standing in total darkness, the vision of Bernice's lifeless face still before him, a lingering image in his startled eyes.

The air conditioner! She'd had the air conditioner repaired and the pull of air as it came on had closed the door! His mind refused to believe it, but his heart left.

Cautiously Eldon's trembling fingers groped through darkness and tested the doorknob. It wouldn't turn. The door was locked.

A hoarse cry broke from

Eldon and he flung himself against the door, staggered back from the impact and his heel dug into something soft, tripping him to sit spreadlegged on the cold tile floor. He drew back and with low, rhythmic sobs crept to a wall, crawled pressing cat-like against it as he explored the thick baseboard with futilely searching fingers. Finally he came to the inevitable corner and sat whimpering, wedging himself firmly, violently, into the unyielding angle of the solid walls, and began his wait.

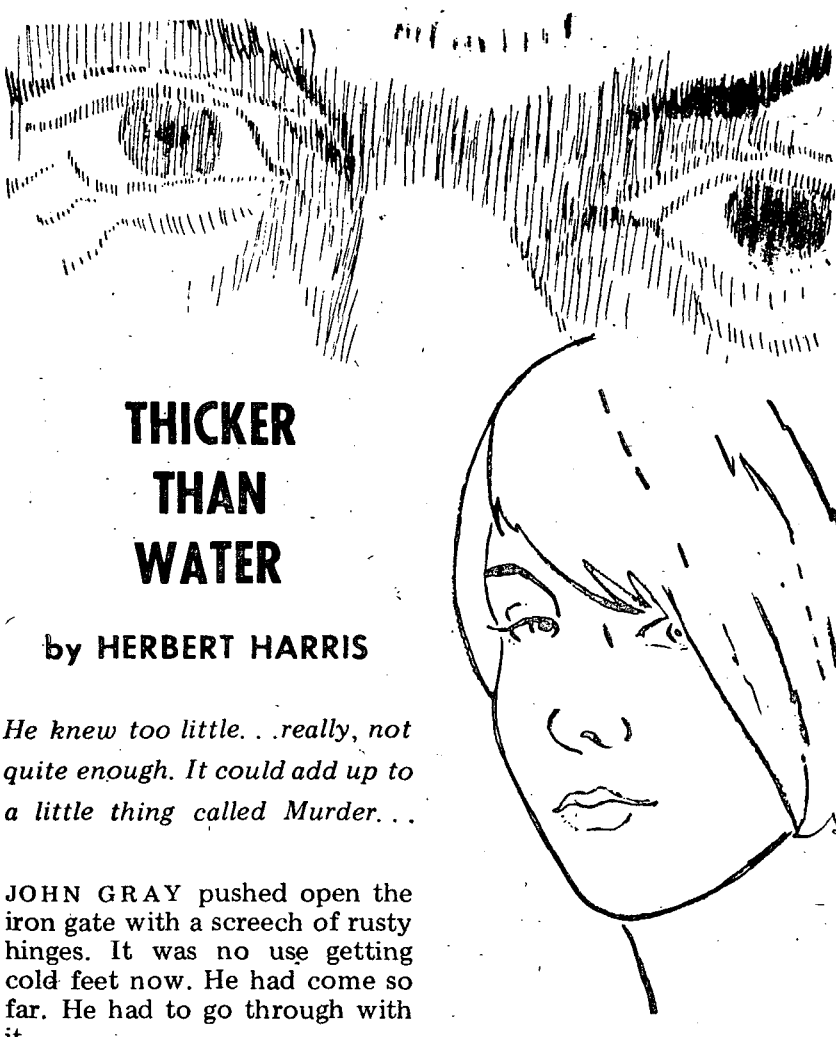
The room was very dark, and soon it became very cold, and but for Eldon's desperate whimpering it was almost completely quiet.

It wasn't so much the prospect of his own imminent death like Bernice's that drove Eldon to dig his aching heels into the floor, fighting to press ever backward into the corner. It was the madly irrational yet terrifyingly persistent illusion that, as the final darkness closed and the door latch had clicked, she had smiled at him.

ATTENTION—WESTERN FANS

Have You Met Mike Shayne's Frontier Companion?

ZANE GREY WESTERN MAGAZINE



THICKER THAN WATER

by HERBERT HARRIS

He knew too little. . . really, not quite enough. It could add up to a little thing called Murder. . .

JOHN GRAY pushed open the iron gate with a screech of rusty hinges. It was no use getting cold feet now. He had come so far. He had to go through with it.

He was looking at the house in Hampshire, the house called Greystones, for the first time—a quiet, creeper-covered house squatting among the trees like an old, tired, dozing cat.

Somewhere inside was

Simon Cartland, the man who, he hoped, would be waiting to welcome him home; the man who had never seen him, the man who would never see him . . . because Simon Cartland

had been blind for nearly forty years.

When he had crossed the threshold of Greystones, he would cease finally to be John Gray. He would be George Cartland, nephew, and only living relative of the old blind man.

If you looked at it objectively, he told himself, this was doing Simon Cartland a good turn. The old man had lived not only in a world of darkness, but in a world of solitude. The return of his long-lost "nephew" would bring balm to his few remaining years. Gray trusted that they would be few.

The "reunion" would present its hidden pitfalls. He would feel uneasy, but mustn't show it. After all, the old man couldn't see him.

The housekeeper who had known the real George Cartland was no longer there. She had long since gone home to Scotland, and another housekeeper, Mrs. Lucy Barlow, had replaced her.

John Gray paused. For the third time he went through his pockets, to be certain beyond doubt that nothing remained to identify him as his real self. George Cartland's wallet—even inscribed "G.C." Cartland's passport. An old bill made out to "G. Cartland" by some cheap little hotel in Marseilles. A few other odds and ends. All

pointing to the fact that he was, indeed the prodigal nephew.

He looked at the passport photo of Cartland. Not a good likeness of the late George, and looking much more like John Gray, especially now that Gray had grown that thin dark moustache to help the illusion. He had thought seriously of changing the photo for one of himself, but decided that it didn't matter.

He put the wallet away, the only thing that remained of the late George Cartland, who had died outside an Algiers brothel with a thin dagger in his back and documents identifying him as John Gray in his pocket.

Gray wondered if he would have to come face to face with some woman—some woman who had known George well. If it happened, he would have to ride out the situation.

"I only ever loved one girl," George had told him. "A barmaid named Molly West. She turned out to be a little tramp. That's why I'm what I am today, old boy." He had seemed to like talking to Gray. Gray was always good for another bottle of scotch.

"I haven't a soul who cares a hoot about me, except maybe old Uncle Simon. 'George, my boy,' he'd say 'you're the last of the Cartlands after me—a shocking specimen to end the



line with, but a Cartland nevertheless."

Presently the jigsaw pieces of information fitted together, making a clear picture.

Old Simon Cartland had been blind since a grenade burst in his face in 1918. His nephew George had been born in 1920. Thus the old man had never seen him.

"After my parents died, old Uncle Simon started to hold a watching brief over me—if watching is the right word for a man without sight. But I did a

bunk with Molly West. The old boy didn't like that. Maybe if Molly hadn't been such a tramp, things might have turned out okay. The old boy might have come round and I should have had his dough to look forward to."

"So you never went back?"

"No, I never went back. I never shall go back. To hell with everyone."

George had been drunk when he died. Many had died in a like fashion in the same Algiers alleyway. It was of little consequence to anybody anywhere that a white drifter had fallen victim to a knife.

The composition of the letter to Simon Cartland had taken Gray some time.

"Dear Uncle Simon: It is five years since I left England, five years since I was in touch with you. Now I'm homesick for the old country. After all, you and I are the only two Cartlands left, and blood is thicker than water. . . ."

There had been more in this vein before the final: "So I am coming home via Marseilles, and in the not too distant future, I shall be presenting myself at Greystones. I hope the welcome won't be too harsh, and that you will forgive me for not turning out as you hoped I might. I look forward to seeing you again tremendously. Your

affectionate nephew, George."

John Gray eyed the neglected old house, braced himself, tossed away his cigarette, and walked up the crumbling drive.

He tugged at a bell-pull and set a bell jangling in the house. This was the moment. . .

The housekeeper, Mrs. Barlow, opened the door. She had a round, white, moonlike face and untidy grey hair. She peered at him questioningly. He smiled. "I'm George Cartland—Mr. Cartland's nephew."

"Oh, . . . yes," she said. "Yes . . . come in."

Gray found himself in a fusty-smelling drawing-room, and sat a trifle uneasily on the edge of a decrepit armchair. He was debating whether he should smoke when he heard the shuffle of feet. He looked up.

He had expected old Simon Cartland to be led in by Mrs. Barlow, but it was another man

who held Cartland by his arm.

"Uncle Simon," Gray said. He got up, but hesitated in the act of moving forward.

The blind man's face was quite expressionless. He stood there quite motionless for a moment, then gestured to his companion.

Cartland's companion was tall and broad, with greying hair. He came towards Gray, turning a trilby in his hands.

"You are George Cartland?" he asked.

"Yes . . . yes, of course," Gray answered.

The tall man said: "I'm Chief Detective Inspector Manson. I'm afraid I shall have to take you into custody in connection with the death of Molly West, a barmaid, who was found strangled in a Southampton hotel five years ago."

The blind man remained silent as they went out.

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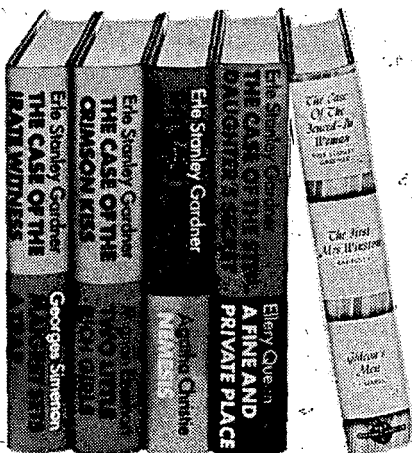
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